

# **I Like You, But You're an Idiot:**

*A study on leader visibility, likability and trust*

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## Abstract

This paper attempts to determine if positive visibility makes a leader likable, and how a leader's likability impacts employee trust. Three hypotheses are researched: 1) Strategic, positive visibility helps a senior leader boost his or her likability; 2) Likability builds employee trust—but only to a minor and limited degree; and 3) An employee's experiences with and feelings about former leaders will impact how that employee feels about a current leader. The topic is scrutinized through the lens of Social Judgment Theory, the Theory of Managing Uncertainty and Attribution Theory; the three support the idea that employees use internal evidence (i.e. memories of previous leaders, personal interactions, etc.) and external research (i.e. co-workers' opinions, etc.) to decide how much they like and trust current leaders. The theories also posit that a leader's actions don't impact an employees' judgment of the leader as much as the employees' perceptions of those actions. Two pieces of primary research are summarized: an online survey experiment and in-person interviews with leaders and communication experts. The survey experiment supports all three hypotheses by indicating that positive visibility boosts a leader's likability, likability does not necessarily make a leader more trustworthy, and employees' experiences with past leaders will color their impressions of current leaders. Recurring themes from the expert interviews imply that likability and trust are not related and that leaders should strive to build employee trust rather than aim to be likable. The paper concludes with recommendations for communication professionals who work closely with senior leaders to build or improve those leaders' personas and, ultimately, increase employee trust.

## About the author

Heather L. Voorhees has more than a decade of experience in journalism and corporate communications. Currently the Communications Manager for Technology and Operations Services (TOS) at U.S. Bank, she works to unify communications within the largest business support service of the corporation and align messages to and from TOS's 8,500-plus employees with the corporate strategy.

Before joining U.S. Bank in spring 2015, Heather worked on the internal communications team at Fairview Health Services for 6.5 years. There, she crafted educational and motivational content for a variety of media, served as a communication consultant for hospital leaders and worked on a number of company-wide events and communication initiatives. At Fairview, the Twin Cities' largest healthcare system, she became interested in leader visibility, likability and trust: How can one senior leader rally 22,000 employees, 5,000 physicians and countless volunteers and community stakeholders? What role does strategic communication play in boosting a leader's internal and external reputation?

Heather holds a bachelor's degree in mass communication (emphasis in print journalism with a minor in speech communication) from Minnesota State University Moorhead. This project is part of her Professional M.A. in Strategic Communication from the University of Minnesota—her first, but not her last, graduate degree.

She wishes to dedicate this piece of work to her husband, Adam, for his immediate and unwavering support of her ambition. She also thanks colleague Reshma Kapadia for her extensive help analyzing survey data and for being such a patient academic partner throughout the entire degree program. Lastly, appreciation goes to friend Amy Martel for graciously stifling yawns during discussions about communication theory and best practices.

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## Long-Awaited Beer With Bush Really Awkward, Voter Reports

WARREN, PA— Although respondents to a Pew poll taken prior to the 2004 presidential election characterized Bush as "the candidate they'd most like to sit down and have a beer with," Chris Reinard lived the hypothetical scenario Sunday afternoon, and characterized it as "really uncomfortable and awkward."

"I thought he'd be great," Reinard said. "But when I actually met him, I felt real put off."

Reinard likened the encounter with Bush to "being cornered at a company Christmas party by your boss."



"Overall, it was okay, I suppose," Reinard said. "One thing's for sure, though—I still wouldn't want to have a beer with that stuck-up Kerry."

This satirical article from America's favorite fake news outlet, *The Onion* (Long-awaited beer with Bush really awkward, voter reports, 2005), brings a wry hint of reality to one of the most tired pre-polling questions of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Presidential elections: "Which candidate would you rather have a beer with?"

Presumably, this question is a bellwether of how much voters like each candidate—which is apparently meant to be a measure of how much they *trust* each candidate to do a good job as president. But as *The Onion* article so humorously points out, a leader's well-calculated public presence doesn't always reflect his or her real personality; just because you relate to someone's public image doesn't mean you like, nonetheless trust, the actual *person*.

Within the world of corporate communications, there is an assumption that the better employees know their leaders, the more employees will trust those leaders. The concept seemingly stems from research of close personal relationships, which shows that “love” and “happiness” are closely tied to the three dimensions of trust: predictability, dependability and faith (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985). Or, as Judith Petts (2008) puts it, “In other words, people are better able to judge the trustworthiness of those they know than those they do not” (p. 823).

But is mere “visibility” enough to build a relationship? There’s a big difference between knowing someone’s name and liking that person—it’s the difference between fame and infamy, popularity and notoriety. Perhaps employees not only have to recognize their leaders, but also *like* them, in order to fully trust them.

To that end, one naturally wonders if likability is even part of the trust-building equation. If you relate to someone on a personal level—if he or she seems like someone you might enjoy chatting with at a cocktail party—does that increase your faith in his or her business acumen? Do you find people who have children the same age as yours or people who like the same sports as you inherently more *trustworthy*? Do you sleep better at night knowing your company’s important strategies, mergers and legal actions are being decided by someone who shares your sense of humor?

Research has been done on the connection between leadership visibility and trust, but the question can and should be extended further to include the concept of likability. This study looks at the relationship between all three aspects:

1. What kind of visibility boosts leader likability?
2. Does likability influence employees’ trust in a leader?

This study hones in on these questions even further, to senior leaders of large business organizations, for whom regular face-to-face interaction with individual employees is challenging. How in the *world* can a leader rally an entire company to trust in him or her to make the best choices possible

for the good of the group—particularly a new leader, who doesn't yet have a reputation within the company and has a limited time frame in which to make a good first impression?

Three hypotheses are tested:

- **Strategic, positive visibility helps a senior leader build likability.** Photos, videos, emails or social media posts showing the leader being positive and engaged will make him or her relatable and likable.
- **Likability builds employee trust—but only to a certain degree.** Likability positively influences one's perception of a leader's trustworthiness up to a point, but after that, trust is only increased based on that leader's business decisions and professional (not personal) traits.
- **One's experiences with and feelings about former leaders can and will impact how one feels about a current leader.** Social Judgment Theory and Theory of Managing Uncertainty (discussed later in this paper) both suggest that previous experiences influence one's feelings on current situations.

## **What the research says: a literature review**

In order to determine how likability affects leadership trust, it's important to first understand what "trust" actually is.

### **What is trust?**

Clark and Payne (2006) define "trustworthy behavior" as the implication that an individual does not take excessive advantage of another's vulnerability and makes good-faith efforts to fulfill commitments.

Mayer and colleagues define trust as, “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party” (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995).

It’s interesting to note that trust in one aspect of a person, object or situation does not always translate into trust in the entire thing. In a University of Minnesota doctoral dissertation on leadership and trust, Rena Rasch astutely points out that, according to Mayer’s definition of trust, “The trustor expects the trustee to perform a ‘particular action.’ This implies, while the trustee is expected to perform well in a specific way, it may not be expected to perform well in *other* ways. For example, I trust my hairstylist to cut my hair, but I don’t trust him to do my taxes” (Rasch, 2012). In the discussion of leadership trust, you may trust your boss as a *person*—you believe he or she won’t fire you for no reason or otherwise treat you harshly—but that may not translate into trusting him or her to make savvy decisions for your company, as a whole.

For the purpose of this study, it’s important to understand the subtle but important distinction between “trust” and “confidence.” Luhmann (2000) suggests both concepts, “refer to expectations which may lapse into disappointments” (p. 97), but trust requires previous experience on your part and presupposes the possibility of risk—if you do not attribute a bad outcome to some decision or choice you’ve made, there is no need for trust. Luhmann gives the example of leaving your house every day without a weapon, without considering alternatives, because you are *confident* you will not be mauled—or that, if you are, it’s not attributed to any action or choice *you* made. But when you buy a used car, you recognize the risk that you could inadvertently select a lemon, therefore you put your trust in the salesman not to swindle you. Trust depends on the presence of risk, which we attribute differently than we do danger; as Luhmann says, “trust is only required if a bad outcome would make you regret your action” (p. 98).



That's why it's important for corporate leaders to work to build trust: businesses are constantly facing all sorts of risks, and employees attribute leaders' unwise or unethical choices to leaders' personal flaws (and then regret their decision to trust the leader, in the first place). Trust is difficult to earn but vital in *any* successful relationship, including those between employees and bosses.

### **What physical or personality traits lead you to trust someone?**

Plenty of research has identified physical attractiveness as an advantage, whether that be in the job market, political landscape or romantic battlefield. But does attractiveness breed likability—and does likability breed trust? Do you trust the prettiest person in the room?

Studies have shown that physical beauty (as manifested in facial symmetry) implies competence, and competence breeds popularity. A fascinating study in 2009 suggested that political candidates deemed to be more competent—based solely on their physical appearance—were more likely to win elections, while those perceived to be more friendly (based on study participants rating their faces on aspects like “sociability” and “pleasantness”) were more likely to lose (Castelli, Carraro, Ghitti, & Pastore, 2009). Further, the study showed competence and sociability to be *negatively* correlated, with voters perceiving competence when sociability is low, and vice versa: “high perceived sociability could be associated to excessive attention to interpersonal relations and to a consequent high malleability and low dominance” (Castelli, et al., 2009, p. 1152).

Butler (1991) identified 10 key conditions of trust, which most researchers agree are valid, including:

1. openness
2. receptivity
3. availability
4. fairness
5. loyalty
6. promise fulfillment
7. integrity
8. competence
9. discreteness
10. consistency

In other words, nice guys really *do* finish last; because affability is seen as a sign of weakness in politicians, people would rather vote for the awkward Smart Guy than the Nice Guy.

Which spells trouble for nice people—and women. A literature review by Kathleen Dolan (2006) posits that the public perceives female political candidates to be more compassionate, caring and passive than their male counterparts, which doesn't jive with the generally-held "masculine" expectations of executive-level positions and political seats.

(It should be noted that politics and private industry are two very different beasts, and what is true for one world does not necessarily carry over into the other.)

So what, then, makes you trust a leader? A 2014 review of interviews with 34 professionals defined "executive presence" as the ability of an individual to "exert influence beyond that conferred through formal authority," based on how he or she is perceived by audience members (Dagley & Gaskin, 2014). This study identified 10 core characteristics that affect "executive presence," including five impressions made during initial contact (status/reputation, physical appearance, projected confidence, communication skill and engagement skills) and five evaluations made over time (interpersonal integrity, intellect and expertise, values in action, outcome delivery ability and coercive power use). Participants in the study defined "engagement skills" with terms like, "eagerness to engage," "sincerity" and "friendliness."

In a study involving nearly 400 bank and hospital employees, Clark & Payne (2006) found a clear association between leadership trust and just a few key attributes: ability, integrity, fairness and openness. (Notice these describe a leader's working style more than his or her personality or physical appearance.)

### **How does visibility factor into likability and trust?**

A key finding of Dagley & Gaskin's 2014 study is the idea that leadership behavior doesn't influence subordinates' behavior nearly as much as subordinates' *perception* of leaders' behavior. In other words, it doesn't necessarily matter how much integrity, confidence or communication skills a

leader has—it only matters how much others *believe* he or she has (an idea at the foundation of Attribution Theory, to be discussed later in this paper). Furthermore, peoples’ perceptions can change over time as a result of additional exposure to the leader (Dagley & Gaskin, 2014).

Bates and Weighart (2014) define “leadership presence” as “the capacity to mobilize, influence and engage others,” and identify 15 personal attributes in three categories (Character, Style and Substance) which they believe are “essential qualities of leadership” that build one’s presence. They noted that it’s not always a case of having these qualities, but of effectively demonstrating them: you might be a great listener, but if your busy schedule prohibits proper, time-consuming conversations with employees, people will assume you are “too busy to listen.” Therefore, in order to succeed in mobilizing, influencing and engaging employees, leaders need to not only have these 15 qualities, but learn how to best prove them to their followers.

In that vein, several studies have argued that trust in authority figures is created via three avenues: the leader’s personal competence, how fairly and respectfully the leader interacts with followers and how the leader acts in context to the situation (Tyler & Lind, 1992) (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). In other words, personality and capability are just one factor in employee trust – the leader can’t just seem friendly and competent, he or she also has to treat people fairly and interact appropriately with the environment and scenario.

Furthering this concept, the 2014 Edelman Trust Barometer—an annual study of global employees’ trust in their own companies and the business world, overall—found that both executives and employees believe that CEOs can build trust by regularly engaging directly with employees to discuss the state of their business (Edelman, 2014). (Interestingly, the same study found that lower-level employees value CEO interaction more highly than executives do, suggesting that CEOs should spend less time with their direct reports and more time “out and about” with rank-and-file employees.)

This is where strategic visibility opportunities become important: for leaders who can't personally interact with every employee on a regular basis, it's important that they show themselves interacting with employees appropriately to the situational context, embodying important personal qualities like eagerness to engage, sincerity, friendliness and intelligence.

### **What the academics say: Applicable theories**

Plenty of theories have been devised to explain how people process impressions of strangers and those they are “supposed” to inherently trust (such as organizational leaders). In particular, Attribution Theory, the Theory of Managing Uncertainty and Social Judgment Theory all lend clarity to how employees view the actions of leaders and make subsequent judgments about those leaders' likability and trustworthiness—especially new leaders who are tasked with making a strong first impression.

#### **Attribution Theory**

Attribution Theory, first articulated by Fritz Heider in the 1940's, is based in the assumption that people have a desire to explain important events and outcomes in their lives and their emotions, expectations and behaviors are based on their beliefs about the causes of their successes and failures, i.e., “a change in the environment gains its meaning from the source to which it is attributed,” (Heider, 1944). For example, when you are walking on a sidewalk and are suddenly hit by a rock, you decide if you're angry or merely annoyed based on how you attribute the cause of the hit: was the rock thrown in anger by an enemy or was it innocently and randomly kicked up by a passing car? The most common attributional explanations for outcomes are ability, effort, the nature of the task and luck (Martinko, Harvey, & Dansborough, 2011).

Attribution Theory has not been widely applied to organizational science, and there has been little research on how subordinates' attribution styles (i.e. “stable, trait-like tendencies to make certain

types of attributions that affect behaviors across situations”) (Martinko, Harvey, & Dansborough, 2011, p. 145) affect how those people view leaders’ actions.

The way in which an employee interprets a leader’s behavior—based on that employee’s personal biases and beliefs—is as powerful as the leader’s actual actions.

However, this theory gives insight into how subordinates make decisions about liking and trusting their leaders. In 2007, Martinko et al. examined research on leader behavior and found that the amount of variance explained by attributions (ranging from 17 to 36 percent) was comparable to that explained by factors such as charisma and political skill

(from 5 to 18 percent) (Martinko, Harvey, & Douglas, 2007). This implies that the way an employee interprets a leader’s behavior—based on that employee’s personal biases and beliefs—is nearly as powerful as the leader’s actual actions. In other words, it doesn’t only matter what a leader says or does, it matters how those words or actions are construed by employees. The leader should be shown in a positive light that makes him or her look “able” and as if effort is being made—and appearing lucky probably doesn’t hurt, either.

### Theory of Managing Uncertainty

The field of Uncertainty Management Theories, which blossomed from Charles Berger and Richard Callabrese’s 1975 Uncertainty Reduction Theory, attempts to explain how people handle

Employees use external information sources like newsletters, emails and in-person encounters to reduce their uncertainty about leaders and decide whether or not they like, trust and support that leader.

uncertainty or anxiety about new situations. The underlying assumption, clarified by Michael Sunnafrank in 1986, is that people are primarily motivated by maximization of reward.

The Theory of Managing Uncertainty is the only theory in this family created specifically to address organizational uncertainty. It posits that when presented with a new idea, person or situation that creates

uncertainty, people go through six stages (Afifi, 2009):

1. Experience uncertainty.
2. Attempt to reduce the uncertainty without the need to search for information (using past experiences to explain the new situation).
3. If necessary, seek information externally.
4. Handle competing motives to the effort to seek information, such as impression management and social appropriateness (these motives might end the process).
5. Select from a host of communication behaviors in order to garner information, such as passive actions or direct information requests.
6. Come out of the process with a different degree of uncertainty than at the beginning.

Applying this theory to leadership visibility, likability and trust, when someone is faced with a leader—especially a new leader, about whom a person hasn't yet formed an opinion—someone will experience uncertainty about that leader: Is he or she intelligent? Capable? Friendly? The employee will probably try to compare the leader to others he or she has had, in an effort to reduce uncertainty around the new leader. An example: a 2012 study found that an employee's trust in his or her direct supervisor *substantially* influences the trust that employee has in senior management (Kannan-Narasimhan & Lawrence, 2012). This concept builds on this study's third hypothesis, that past encounters with senior leaders—and perhaps, also with current and previous *direct supervisors*—impact one's perceptions of a current senior leader.

Should one's internal decision-making process fail to manage uncertainty, the employee will then use external information (context clues, co-workers' opinions, stories or photos about the leader, in-person experiences with that leader, etc.) to create assumptions about the leader (unless the employee feels that learning more about a leader is somehow inappropriate within their particular work culture, or that the process might negatively impact the employee's own reputation).

That's why it's so important for leaders to be visible, and for that visibility to be thoughtful, strategic and positive: employees use external information sources like newsletters, emails and in-person encounters to reduce their uncertainty about leaders and decide whether or not they like, trust and support that leader.

### **Social Judgment Theory**

This theory, first developed by Carolyn and Muzafer Sherif and Carl Hovland in the 1970's, helps explain how and why people react to persuasive messages, and what it takes to get someone to change his or her mind. According to Social Judgment Theory, when someone absorbs a message, he or she makes a judgment about it using internal, pre-determined benchmarks against which the message is compared (Hovland & Sherif, 1980). Upon hearing a message, the listener files it into one of three mental categories: latitude of acceptance, latitude of rejection or latitude of non-commitment; the person is most persuaded to change his or her mind when the idea being pushed falls within their latitude of non-commitment, *just outside* their latitude of rejection (Seiter, 2009).

Social Judgment Theory also states that when considering how to feel about a particular situation, people attach their egos to the issue; ego involvement determines how open someone will be to change and how much they will take others' opinions into account when making up their minds (Mallard, 2010). Further complicating the act of persuasion is the idea that individuals compare their beliefs with others' to determine what is and isn't acceptable for themselves and others; i.e. many people ascribe to the, "Do as I say, not as I do" mindset, disapproving of things for others that they find acceptable for themselves.

Applying Social Judgment Theory to leadership visibility, likability and trust, one can infer that employees judge current leaders (particularly new leaders) against those they've known in the past, for better or for worse. Using past experience and external information gathering (i.e. talking with

colleagues, hearing stories about friends' bosses, etc.), people create their own latitudes of acceptance and rejection concerning a leader's behavior, attitude, decisions, personality, etc. If they see or hear of a leader doing something outside of that latitude of acceptance, they will have negative feelings toward that leader. Furthermore, people will take others' opinions into account when deciding what is "acceptable" for a leader—and they will hold leaders to a different standard than they hold themselves.

### **What the experts say: First-person interviews**

To test the hypothesis that visibility can build likability and likability positively correlates with trust to a limited degree, in-depth interviews were conducted with five professionals who have either first-person leadership experience or experience boosting senior leaders' visibility to increase employee trust. Four have worked extensively in corporate communication—specifically with senior leaders—while two have served as senior leaders, themselves; one interviewee has performed both roles. Purposely avoiding the political realm (since, as noted before, political trust is a whole different beast than Corporate America), these interviews targeted experts with experience in various industries: three of my interview subjects have worked in the non-profit healthcare field, two have experience in the food production and distribution industry and two have experience in finance (see: Appendix, Exhibits A-E, for interview transcripts).

#### **Cindy Fruitrail**

Cindy Fruitrail currently serves as strategic advisor to C.E.O. and vice president of communications and public affairs for Fairview Health Services. She's been with Fairview for 17 years total, and her professional background includes a stint in human relations, so she is well positioned to offer guidance about strategically building trust to boost employee engagement. Over the past five years, specifically, she has worked with several senior leaders (including C.E.O.s, vice presidents and



board members) as they have entered Fairview, helping them decide, “What they want to be known for: how important it is that they are visible, versus known for their business acumen. I help identify their platform and suggest communication techniques and tactics” (Fruitrail, 2015).

### **Erika Taibl**

Erika Taibl, acting director of corporate communications for Land O’Lakes Inc., previously served as manager of internal communications for Fairview Health Services for more than six years. She has a decade of first-hand experience helping company leaders shape their images and manage their personas: “I’ve worked with executives at the tippy-top, that person’s direct reports, and then the direct reports of that next level,” she says (Taibl, 2015).

### **Rebekah Fawcett**

Rebekah Fawcett has worked as the vice president and head of internal communications for U.S. Bank since July 2014. As such, she works closely with top leaders of the country’s fifth-largest retail bank, helping ensure proper messaging and consulting around the best way to tell the company story. Before joining the bank, she worked for a large grocery company for more than 12 years, primarily in communications roles. She explains her qualifications simply: “I’ve supported executive leaders since I was 22, from re-orgs, to leader changes, to labor situations, to ‘how should we remodel this break room?’” (Fawcett, 2015)

### **David Therkelsen**

David Therkelsen is unique to this study in that he has rich experience as both a communications professional *and* a leader. He worked as director of public relations for the American Red Cross from 1978 to 1993, as well as the chief marketing officer for biomedical services from 1993 to 2001. From

there, David became the CEO of the St. Paul Area chapter of the American Red Cross from 2001-2006, at which point he became the executive director of Crisis Connection until 2010. From 2010 until retiring in 2014, David served full-time in faculty and administrative roles in the University of Minnesota School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

### **Jeffry H. von Gillern**

Since 2010, Jeffry (Jeff) von Gillern has been vice chairman of Technology and Operations Services (TOS) at U.S. Bank, reporting directly to the company's C.E.O. He previously served as the bank's Chief Information Officer from 2007 to 2010. Before joining U.S. Bank, von Gillern worked for Visa, first as a shift manager and eventually working his way up. He has been in a leadership role for 24 of the 26 years he's spent in the financial services/technology and operations fields.

Themes that emerged from these interviews include:

**Compared to photos, videos, social media or phone conversations, in-person interaction is the most desirable form of leader visibility.**

As a communications professional and a leader, Therkelsen was a strong believer in face-to-face interaction with employees: "The literature proves [face-to-face] is more effective because it has potential to be two-way, and most of the time, it is," he says (Therkelsen, 2015).

As a chapter C.E.O. for the Red Cross, Therkelsen attended all new-employee orientation sessions and made a point to spend several hours each week working in a centrally-located conference room, encouraging employees to stop by and visit with him about anything and everything.

"We also did something called a Convergence Meeting," he says. "If the schedulers told me there'd be two [mobile blood collection] teams staying at the Holiday Inn at Mankato, a couple of

leaders and I would get in a van, go down and have breakfast with them and give them the info that people in the office routinely had access to.”

When asked what tactics she prefers to increase leadership visibility, Taibl’s list is heavy on face-to-face opportunities: “Leaders being present for team meetings or recognition moments, open employee forums, drop-in sessions if a hot topic is going on—just making a leader available,” she says. She notes that senior leaders at her current organization host lunchtime listening sessions, to which they invite a handful of randomly-selected employees and encourage open conversation about any topic, personal or work-related; the sessions seem popular with employees.

### **There’s no universal “magic bullet” when it comes to effective leader visibility.**

Fruittrail believes there is no “one size fits all” approach to leadership visibility that will build likability and/or trust.

“A lot of times, a leader will come in and say, ‘What works here?’ They want to connect with people the way other leaders have before, but... that won’t work for [them],” she says. “There have been instances where I’ve said, ‘This has worked in the past, but we’re *not* going to do this for you!’ because if a leader’s not comfortable, it’s miserable and people know instantly. It’s hard to recover from that.”

Taibl agrees each leader needs to customize his or her approach to visibility, leaning on the unique skillset he or she brings to the table: “There’s a lot to be said for standardization and for using best practices, but you still have to take the individual leader into account,” she says.

### **Authenticity is critical.**

Above all, employees want a leader who can pass the “smell test:” they inherently know when leaders aren’t being true to themselves, and that negatively impacts both likability and trust.

“People can tell when you’re not being real,” Fawcett says. “If you try to force authenticity, it will hurt you.”

She speaks of a female leader who was notoriously awkward in large-group presentations, but was comfortable and confident in small, intimate settings: “Get her in a room with 12 people, give them

“If you try to force authenticity, it will hurt you.”  
-Rebekah Fawcett

some box lunches and she was *real*, she was authentic, she would tell you what was on her mind, because that’s where she was

comfortable. Standing up in front of a huge audience as the expert, she was not comfortable. That hurt her more than helped her.”

Taibl believes it’s simply not in certain people’s nature to be warm and open, to share personal details in a professional setting—so they shouldn’t be forced to.

“Sometimes, those sharing moments, if they’re too structured, they can backfire,” she says. “I always tell leaders, only mention your family or private life if it feels comfortable. Some people hate talking about their kids at work.”

### **Trying too hard can backfire.**

Interviewees agreed that leaders who focus too much on building an affable, likable persona do so at the peril of their efficacy.

“I’ve had leaders who were just so absorbed in their personal likability that it became miserable to work for them,” Fruitrail says. “I tend to believe good intentions and wanting to do good work in a respectful environment will generate a level of likability in a leader, whether or not we like the same wine.”

Says Fawcett: “The leaders who spend so much time in the space of, ‘Do they like me?’ versus, ‘Am I getting stuff done?’ are less likely to get things done.”

That's where leaders rely on corporate communication professionals who can read specific situations and understand how to bring out the leader's strengths.

"If you fit the leader into some sort of construct, they'll go there with you because you recommend it, but it won't be them, and you might do more damage," Taibl says.

### **A leader's sincere eagerness to engage encourages trust.**

Both Therkelsen and von Gillern stressed the importance of showing employees you truly want to understand their roles.

As senior leader of two field units of the American Red Cross, Therkelsen strove to personally connect with his geographically-disseminated workforce by travelling to one or two mobile blood collection drives per year, spending a full day working alongside the phlebotomists (doing relatively mundane work he was legally and ethically authorized to do, of course!).

On the Operations side of von Gillern's area of responsibility, some locations are staffed 24 hours a day by employees with varying levels of education, whose roles don't regularly place them in front of email or company newsletters.

"You have to make a real effort to get in front of those people," he says. "You have to understand the differences in what it means to work from midnight to 8, or 8 to 4. You have to know your audience. Most of my management team can say we've either done or have associated with some of the jobs in this department. That's an important connection, and it's important to be humble" (Gillern, 2015).

He notes that his direct-report management teams rotate meetings to various cities where U.S. Bank has large Operations groups, dedicating a half-day of each trip to hosting employee forums.

"You have to know your audience... and it's important to be humble."

-Jeff von Gillern

“We bring some humor into it, we call some people out to let them know we understand what’s happening their areas,” he says. “We’re not there to pontificate.”

**Likability is nice, but it doesn’t automatically build trust—*competence* builds trust.**

For von Gillern, trust is built by consistently doing the right thing; likability is “a by-product.”

“Trust isn’t something I wake up and think about, and it doesn’t just happen in a week,” he says.

“People watch how leaders behave in tough times and challenges, to see if they waver on their principles, and people make judgments on those things. It’s about doing things that are right for the business, which are right for employees; if, along the way, someone likes you on a personal level, that’s great—that’s an additive—but that’s not what I strive for.”

Fruitrail agrees that likability is much less important to effective leadership than competence, integrity and vision.

“You don’t show up to work every day because you *like* somebody!” she says. “I believe that what makes a leader most effective is someone who has a compelling vision. People want to follow something, but they don’t want to follow a person just for the sake of following. They want to *go* somewhere.”

Taibl talks of a female leader in her current organization who, “strikes fear in the hearts of people because she’s so dang smart and she holds people accountable. I don’t know if employees like her, but I think they totally trust her and would do anything she says. She’s incredibly fair because she’s data-driven, but [employees had] darn well better know their stuff.”

Fawcett shares a story of a male leader at her former organization who was, “brilliant but horrible to work with. People walked through fire with him because they knew he was very contemplative and deliberate, but he’s not the guy you want to take out for a beer. He’s not going to

show you where the bathroom is—you're a big kid, you can find it on your own. He wasn't liked, but if you did your work and worked hard, he stood up for you."

Therkelsen remembers a leader he worked with at the Red Cross, "a tough old guy, a physician, brusque, impatient." He remembers that most people at work didn't like this leader because he didn't bother showing much of his softer side. However, his employees never questioned his business acumen.

"He was trusted because there was no mistaking his passion and commitment to the mission," Therkelsen says. "He was also known for his integrity; his word was gold. If he said something was true, whether you wanted it to be true or not, you could trust it was. People trusted him, but I don't know too many people who liked him very much."

**The process of visibility → likability → trust isn't always linear; many times, likability and trust develop simultaneously.**

Fawcett believes that trust is a stronger and more important factor for leaders to build, but likability should not be completely ignored. It's a balance she's observed in leaders with whom she's worked, but also in her own role as leader of a large communications team.

"At the end of the day, if I have to make a tough decision, I want you to trust that I have your best interest in mind, that I'm not going to do harm and I'm going to try to make things better," she says. "For people to know that you have their back, is an aspect of likability."

Taibl agrees that likability and trust aren't directly correlated nor mutually exclusive: sometimes, a leader builds both at the same time.

"Beer or scotch? That's the kind of things that come *after* the trust is built," she says. "I am not always interested in what kind of music you like, but what was your favorite class in college? That kind of question reveals more about how a person thinks."

## What ‘real people’ think: A survey experiment

While opinions of senior leaders and communication professionals are important, it’s also beneficial to ask “average Joes” to weigh in on the topic of leadership visibility, likability and trust. But simply asking people if they trust the leaders they like more than those they don’t would be too biased; therefore, a survey experiment was created to test if visibility plays a role in likability, and whether or not likability has a hand in building leader trust.

The intent was to test the hypothesis that strategic visibility builds likability, which then builds trust – and to test the idea (as posited by Theory of Managing Uncertainty and Social Judgment Theory) that people tend to judge current leaders based on personal experiences with previous leaders.

### The survey experiment’s parameters

Respondents to the survey (see: Appendix, Exhibit F) were first asked two demographic questions: their age (divided roughly by widely accepted generational lines: Millennials, Gen Xer’s, Baby Boomers, etc.) and how many total years throughout their lifetimes they have worked for a company (i.e. not unemployed or self-employed).

All participants were then asked to pretend they work for the fictional XYZ Company, whose C.E.O. is “Dan Fletcher,” and were randomly split into three groups; each group was shown one set of three photos with accompanying captions. Though the three groups’ photo sets changed, the captions were the same for every group:

1. “C.E.O. Dan Fletcher (shown here) believes XYZ Company’s recent signing of the important Widgets, Inc. account was a direct result of employees’ hard work, long hours and extra effort. ‘We couldn’t have landed this important account without everyone pitching in,’ Mr. Fletcher says.”



2. “C.E.O. Dan Fletcher (shown here, far right) recently returned from a business summit in Oslo, saying the experience was an important step to strengthening XYZ Company’s presence in international dealings.”
3. Dan Fletcher, C.E.O. of XYZ Company recently toured our newest office building (503 Lincoln Street) with members of his family.”

The first group was shown three positive photos of Dan Fletcher: Two photos featured a happy Dan Fletcher interacting with groups of smiling people dressed in business clothing, presumed to be his employees, while the last photo showed the back of a man’s head (i.e. Dan Fletcher) as he hugged an adorable little girl.

The second participant group was also shown three photos of Dan Fletcher, accompanied by the exact same captions as the first batch of photos, but these photos were much less positive in nature.

One showed Dan standing alone in a large, darkened boardroom, arms crossed, staring out the window.

Another photo showed Dan Fletcher seemingly asleep in the middle of a business meeting (see: Figure 1). The last photo showed an unattended baby (presumably Dan’s grandchild) sitting on a desk in an office, playing with a phone, while employees in suits work in the background.



*Figure 1 A photo in the “Bad Dan” group. Accompanied by the caption, “C.E.O. Dan Fletcher (shown here, far right) recently returned from a business summit in Oslo, saying the experience was an important step to strengthening XYZ Company’s presence in international dealings.”*

The third group of participants were shown three snippets of employee

newsletters from XYZ Company, each containing one of the standard captions, but none containing photos. This group was intended to be more neutral, exhibiting neither positive or negative visibility.

Once the photos were viewed, respondents were asked to agree or disagree, on a Linkert scale, with the following questions:

- I like Dan Fletcher
- Dan Fletcher is smart.
- Dan Fletcher is a nice person.
- Dan Fletcher is a capable leader.
- Dan Fletcher cares about his employees.

All participants were then shown the same memo, supposedly sent from Dan Fletcher to all XYZ Company employees, announcing a 20% employee elimination across the company, based on a new restructuring plan, to help XYZ “remain competitive.” In the memo, Dan used language like, “this was a difficult decision,” “I am truly saddened” and “we have exhausted all other options.”

After viewing the memo, all survey participants were asked to rank, on a Linkert scale, how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

- These layoffs are necessary for XYZ Company to stay competitive.
- Dan Fletcher is saddened by the layoffs.
- This was a difficult decision for Dan Fletcher to make.
- Dan Fletcher exhausted all other options before considering layoffs.

Respondents were then asked about their current, real-life employment status and how large their current or immediate previous company was. Finally, respondents were asked to rank (on a sliding scale, from 0 to 100) how much they trusted their current or former company’s top-most leader and how much they liked that person. (This block of questions was asked at the end of the survey, as it may have biased respondents if asked at the beginning, by hinting at what the experiment is studying.)

## Logistics

The survey was created using Qualtrics software and was open from Monday, May 25, 2015, through Saturday, June 6, 2015. Respondents were solicited via snowball sampling method; the survey link was initially emailed to about 70 friends and acquaintances with a request that they share the link via social media.

In total, 358 respondents started the survey and 339 completed it, for a completion rate of 95%. Thirty-two outliers were omitted: 22 respondents did not finish the entire survey, nine people took longer than 30 minutes to complete the survey (the average was around 6 minutes) and one person finished in under 60 seconds. In the end, there were 326 usable responses.

Seventy percent of respondents were women, 29% were men and 1% preferred not to answer. The vast majority of survey respondents were currently employed (88%) or retired (8%); only 3% were stay-at-home parents or unemployed. The majority of respondents (70%) reported accumulating between six and 25 years of working experience throughout their lifetimes.

Millennials were the largest generation represented (50% of all respondents were between the ages 21 and 38). Gen X was next, with 26% of respondent representing the 39-50 age group; 15% of respondents were Baby Boomers (between the ages of 51 and 60).

## Results and discussion

Survey results were analyzed several different ways.

To test the hypothesis that strategic visibility can boost a leader's likability, I examined any relationship between which of the three photo groups a respondent saw ("Good Dan," "Bad Dan" or "Faceless/Neutral Dan") and how he or she responded to the five questions regarding Dan's personality (see: Figure 2):

	I like Dan.	Dan Fletcher is smart.	Dan Fletcher is a nice person.	Dan Fletcher is a capable leader.	Dan Fletcher cares about his employees.
<b>Good Dan</b> (n=109)	<b>3.96</b>	<b>3.81</b>	<b>3.86</b>	<b>3.92</b>	<b>3.98</b>
<b>Faceless Dan</b> (n=110)	<b>3.64</b>	<b>3.51</b>	<b>3.55</b>	<b>3.69</b>	<b>3.79</b>
<b>Bad Dan</b> (n=107)	<b>3.34</b>	<b>3.46</b>	<b>3.58</b>	<b>3.18</b>	<b>3.65</b>
<i>Means of responses. Scale is 1-5, with 1 being "Completely Disagree" and 5 being "Completely Agree."</i>					

Figure 2

The hypothesis suggests that the group exposed to the “Good Dan” would be more likely to agree with these questions, i.e. to like Dan, think he’s a smart or nice person, believe he is a capable leader and agree that he cares about his employees. These response means fall in line with that hypothesis: people who viewed the “Bad Dan” photos were less likely to associate Dan with positive qualities like “nice” and “cares about his employees.”

A T-Test was run to determine if the differences in means between those who viewed “Good Dan” and “Bad Dan” photos are significant enough to indicate actual differences in attitude between those two groups. A T-Test helps determine the probability of obtaining a similar result if the test is replicated on a larger audience. For this study, each question where the P Value is <.05, we reject the “null hypothesis,” which states that there is no real difference between the attitudes of the “Good Dan” and “Bad Dan” groups (see: Figure 3).

	I like Dan Fletcher.	Dan Fletcher is smart.	Dan Fletcher is a nice person.	Dan Fletcher is a capable leader.	Dan Fletcher cares about his employees.
<b>P value</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.004</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.004</b>

Figure 3

Indicates the P Value is <.05, i.e. the relationship is statistically significant

Because all of these P Values are much lower than .05, we can safely assume a notable and significant difference between how the “Good Dan” and “Bad Dan” respondents feel about Dan. In other

words, for each of the five questions, the response means of the “Good Dan” group were high enough above those of the “Bad Dan” group to indicate a very real shift in attitude. Those exposed to photos of “Good Dan” had a more positive opinion of him than those who saw traditionally negative photo of “Bad Dan.”

Analysis was also run to determine if respondents who viewed “Good Dan” pictures were more likely to *trust* Dan, as indicated by their scores on the series of questions asked after they viewed the memo from Dan announcing 20% employee layoffs across the company (see: Figure 4):

	These layoffs are necessary for XYZ Company to stay competitive.	Dan Fletcher is saddened by the layoffs.*	This was a difficult decision for Dan Fletcher to make.*	Dan Fletcher exhausted all other options before considering layoffs.*
<b>Good Dan</b> (n=109)	<b>3.55</b>	<b>3.65</b>	<b>3.65</b>	<b>3.20</b>
<b>Faceless Dan</b> (n=110)	3.54	3.53	3.62	3.10
<b>Bad Dan</b> (n=107)	<b>3.61</b>	<b>3.51</b>	<b>3.56</b>	<b>3.09</b>
<i>Means of responses. Scale is 1-5, with 1 being "Completely Disagree" and 5 being "Completely Agree."</i>				

Figure 4 \*Denotes verbiage directly from memo.

Those who viewed the “Good Dan” photos were more inclined to believe that Dan was personally saddened by the difficult decision to lay off employees and that he exhausted all over options before considering the layoffs; this indicates that those who liked Dan thought the layoffs affected him in a genuine way.

However, when asked if “these layoffs are necessary for XYZ Company to stay competitive,” those who viewed “Good Dan” pictures were *not* more likely to think the layoffs were necessary. This implies that Dan’s likability doesn’t necessarily equate to trust in his business savvy.

But that is probably a moot point: when a T-Test was run on these figures, the difference between the “Good Dan” and “Bad Dan” respondents are *not* be statistically significant (see: Figure 5):

	These layoffs are necessary for XYZ Company to stay competitive.	Dan Fletcher is saddened by the layoffs.	This was a difficult decision for Dan Fletcher to make.	Dan Fletcher exhausted all other options before considering layoffs.
P Value	<b>0.307</b>	<b>0.135</b>	<b>0.257</b>	<b>0.214</b>

Figure 5

Indicates the P Value is  $<.05$ , i.e. the relationship is statistically significant

Because each of these P Values is much higher than .05, we assume there is *no significant difference* between how the “Good Dan” and “Bad Dan” viewers feel about Dan’s attitude toward the layoffs.

Overall, these survey results support the hypothesis that strategic visibility helps boost a leader’s likability. However, considering Figure 5, there is no strong relationship between Dan’s likability and trustworthiness. While respondents who saw “Good Dan” photos were more likely to think he is nice

Respondents who viewed “Good Dan” photos were **more likely than average to like Dan Fletcher**, but not more likely to trust his business decisions.

and likable, they don’t significantly trust him more when it comes to tough business decisions. This implies that likability does not necessarily breed trust—at least, not on its own.

To test the hypothesis that feelings about former leaders will influence feelings toward a current leader, survey data was sliced to examine any relationship between how much respondents like and trust their current or immediate-former boss and how they view Dan Fletcher.

Survey respondents were asked to rank, on a sliding scale from 0 to 100 with 0 being “Not at all” and 100 being “Very much,” how much they liked their current or immediate former “top leader” (president or C.E.O.) and how much they trusted that person. When analyzing the data, it would’ve been unproductive to divide the respondents into strictly percent-based quartiles because there were very few people who chose between 0 and 25, or between 25 and 50. Therefore, the total amount of

survey respondents who answered these questions—305 people—were divided into four groups of equal size (see: Figure 6):

<b>"I like my current/former leader as a person." (scale of 0-100)</b>		<b>Mean Score</b>
highest rating group (n=75)	class 1	97.45
high rating group (n=77)	class 2	83.26
low rating group (n=77)	class 3	65.14
lowest rating group (n=77)	class 4	27.04

Figure 6

Survey results were examined to determine how respondents in each of these groups feel about Dan Fletcher. To simplify the analysis, only Class 1 (those who like their current senior leader the most) and Class 4 (those who like their current senior leader the least) will be compared.

For all questions but one, respondents in Class 1 thought more highly of Dan Fletcher as a person than those in Class 4 (see: Figure 7):

	I like Dan Fletcher.	Dan Fletcher is smart.	Dan Fletcher is a nice person.	Dan Fletcher is a capable leader.	Dan Fletcher cares about his employees.
Class 1	<b>3.61</b>	<b>3.68</b>	<b>3.80</b>	<b>3.58</b>	<b>3.91</b>
Class 4	<b>3.54</b>	<b>3.49</b>	<b>3.46</b>	<b>3.66</b>	<b>3.67</b>
Total Mean of all four classes	<b>3.65</b>	<b>3.60</b>	<b>3.67</b>	<b>3.60</b>	<b>3.81</b>

Figure 7

Indicates the Class 1 mean is higher than Class 4 mean

A T-test was run on these numbers to determine if the differences between the means were statistically significant. For three questions in which Class 1 scored higher than Class 4, the difference in means was significant (see: Figure 8):

	I like Dan Fletcher.	Dan Fletcher is smart.	Dan Fletcher is a nice person.	Dan Fletcher is a capable leader.	Dan Fletcher cares about his employees.
P Value	<b>0.092</b>	<b>0.017</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.431</b>	<b>0.009</b>

Figure 8

Indicates the P Value is <.05, i.e. the relationship is statistically significant

This supports the hypothesis that a positive relationship with a former leader will positively impact relationships with or impression of one's current leader—when it comes to likability, anyway.

To test whether liking a former leader positively impacts one's *trust* in a current leader, the same respondent groupings were compared against questions regarding Dan Fletcher's business savvy (i.e. the series of questions asked after respondents viewed the memo about 20% employee layoffs at XYZ Company). Those in Class 1, or the quartile who agreed most strongly with the statement, "I like my current or former senior leader as a person," also more strongly agreed with questions about Dan being a compassionate, capable leader (see: Figure 9):

	These layoffs are necessary for XYZ Company to stay competitive.	Dan Fletcher is saddened by the layoffs.	This was a difficult decision for Dan Fletcher to make.	Dan Fletcher exhausted all other options before considering layoffs.
Class 1	<b>3.63</b>	<b>3.78</b>	<b>3.76</b>	<b>3.33</b>
Class 4	<b>3.46</b>	<b>3.38</b>	<b>3.51</b>	<b>2.99</b>
Total Mean of all four classes	<b>3.56</b>	<b>3.57</b>	<b>3.61</b>	<b>3.13</b>

Figure 9

Indicates the Class 1 mean is higher than Class 4 mean

A T-Test indicates there is statistical significance in three of these results—the three questions dealing more with Dan's personal emotions than his business decisions, and the three questions that had Dan's name directly in them (see: Figure 10):

	These layoffs are necessary for XYZ Company to stay competitive.	Dan Fletcher is saddened by the layoffs.	This was a difficult decision for Dan Fletcher to make.	Dan Fletcher exhausted all other options before considering layoffs.
P Value	<b>0.066</b>	<b>0.002</b>	<b>0.022</b>	<b>0.007</b>
Indicates the P Value is <.05, i.e. the relationship is statistically significant				

Figure 10



Perhaps a better comparison is examining how people's sense of trust in their current or immediate-former leader correlates with their trust in Dan. Using the responses to the question of how much survey respondents trust their current or immediate-former top leader (on a sliding scale from 0 to 100 with 0 being "Not at all" and 100 being "Very much,"), respondents were again broken into four equal classes (see: Figure 11):

<b>"I trust my current/former leader." (0-100)</b>		<b>Mean Score</b>
highest rating group (n= 75)	class 1	96.64
high rating group (n=76)	class 2	82.43
low rating group (n=78)	class 3	65.05
lowest rating group (n=76)	class 4	27.87

Once again, respondents who trusted their current or immediate-former leader more were more likely to trust that Dan made a good business decision regarding the layoffs (see: Figure 12):

	These layoffs are necessary for XYZ Company to stay competitive.	Dan Fletcher is saddened by the layoffs.	This was a difficult decision for Dan Fletcher to make.	Dan Fletcher exhausted all other options before considering layoffs.
Class 1	<b>3.72</b>	<b>3.83</b>	<b>3.80</b>	<b>3.31</b>
Class 4	<b>3.52</b>	<b>3.40</b>	<b>3.53</b>	<b>2.99</b>

Figure 12

Indicates the Class 1 mean is higher than Class 4 mean

And once again, the T-Test shows a statistically significant relationship between a respondent's trust for his or her current or immediate-former leader and that respondent's trust in Dan Fletcher's business sense (see: Figure 13):

	These layoffs are necessary for XYZ Company to stay competitive.	Dan Fletcher is saddened by the layoffs.	This was a difficult decision for Dan Fletcher to make.	Dan Fletcher exhausted all other options before considering layoffs.
<b>P Value</b>	<b>0.083</b>	<b>0.002</b>	<b>0.029</b>	<b>0.014</b>

Figure 13

Indicates the P Value is <.05, i.e. the relationship is statistically significant

Figure 11

It's worth noting that the question in the above group with the highest P Value (i.e. the question with the weakest relationship between respondents trusting their current leader and trusting Dan Fletcher's layoff decision) was the only question that dealt with the layoffs in terms of benefit to the company – the other questions asked about *Dan's personal reaction* to the layoff decision. This may signal that one's previous trust in an organizational leader will affect the level of trust in a current/future leader as a *person* (i.e. "My leader won't intentionally lie to me and won't purposely harm me or my career.") but may not color one's trust in that leader's *business competency* (i.e. "I'm not convinced he's making the most beneficial choice for the company as a whole."). This harkens back to Rena Rasch's previously mentioned assertion that, "...while the trustee is expected to perform well in a specific way, it may not be expected to perform well in *other* ways. For example, I trust my hairstylist to cut my hair, but I don't trust him to do my taxes." (Rasch, 2012). Survey respondents who trust their current, real-life leader might trust that Dan's feelings of sadness were genuine, but they don't necessarily trust that laying off 20% of the company was the smartest business move.

### Survey summary

These survey experiment results support the hypothesis that strategic, positive visibility helps build a leader's likability. However, results indicate that liking a senior leader does not automatically equate to trusting him or her; there was no statistically significant relationship between how much respondents liked Dan Fletcher and how much they believed his decision to lay off 20% of the company was necessary. (Interestingly, those who liked Dan Fletcher were more likely to believe that he was personally saddened by the layoffs, indicating that even if the respondents didn't have much faith in Dan's leadership skills, they still thought he was a good person.)

The survey results also support the hypothesis that previous experiences with leaders will color someone's impression of a current leader, as posited through Social Judgment Theory and the Theory of

Managing Uncertainty. In the survey experiment, respondents who indicated they liked their current or immediate-past senior leader were more likely to think positively of Dan; similarly, those who trusted their current or immediate-past senior leader were more likely to trust that a 20% layoff of XYZ Company's employees was necessary.

### **What is lacking: The study's limitations**

This study did not take into account how a leader's diversity or gender affects employee trust: though three of the five experts interviewed were female, none were asked specifically whether or not they, as leaders, believe their gender impacted employees' trust in them, nor were any interviewees asked if the leaders they've worked with have experienced any differences or discrimination regarding their genders or races. In the survey experiment, "Dan Fletcher" was intentionally portrayed as a middle-aged Caucasian male; considering the majority of American corporate directors are white males, (nearly 75%, according to the Alliance for Board Diversity (2013)), bringing a female or minority leader into the survey might have tipped off respondents' biases toward females or minorities, rather than their feelings about leaders, in general. The survey *did* record respondents' gender, but because more than 74% of all respondents were female, any significant difference in male-vs.-female perspectives could not be accurately determined.

For simplicity's sake, this entire study focused on trust and visibility within for-profit businesses and specifically shied away from political leaders and candidates, non-profit groups and charities, educational institutions and religious organizations. Further studies should concentrate on these types of organizations, since their employees' expectations of leaders might be different.

The first-person interviews focused on senior leaders and communications professionals who have helped shaped leaders' personas, but it would also be enlightening to speak to "rank-and-file"

employees, since they're the people who are actually forming the opinions with which leaders are so concerned. The survey may very well have captured the opinions of employees and leaders alike, but no demographic information was collected around respondents' positions within their companies, so the data could not be parsed as such.

The survey experiment used a snowball sampling method, simply for the sake of convenience and to ensure enough responses were collected to conduct reasonable analysis. Had particular audiences been targeted, a more diverse group of responses could've been collected and analyzed. For example, it would've been interesting to look for correlations between a respondent's generation and their likelihood of trusting Dan Fletcher: are Millennials be more or less likely to have faith in "Good Dan's" leadership than Baby Boomers? But with 75% of respondents age 50 or less, running that comparison would've been futile.

Not only was the sampling method less than ideal, the Dan Fletcher survey itself had flaws. For example, on the "XYZ Company newsletter" portions shown to the respondent group randomly selected to see the "Neutral Dan" series of images, side stories—meant only to make the newsletters appear authentic—may have influenced how respondents interpreted the main stories. For example, one astute respondent contacted me directly to say that the side story about XYZ employees participating in the

American Heart Association Heart Walk (see: Figure 14) positively impacted how she felt about XYZ Company as a whole, which may have indirectly impacted how she felt about the company's leader, Dan.



Figure 14

In hindsight, the wording of the survey questions could've been more specific. Three of the four questions in the set regarding XYZ Company's 20% layoffs—the three in which there were statistically significant relationships between respondents' current leaders' trustworthiness in *and* likability—hinted more toward Dan's personal reaction to the layoffs (i.e. "This was a difficult decision for Dan to make.") rather than the actual business savvy behind the choices. Questions hoping to uncover how much respondents trusted Dan Fletcher could've been more explicitly worded toward trust: for example, "I trust Dan when he says layoffs are the best move for XYZ Company."

Furthermore, one of the questions in the first set (those aiming at whether or not respondents like Dan) clearly does not belong: "Dan Fletcher is a capable leader" speaks more about respondents' trust in Dan's business acumen than whether or not they *like* him. That question should have been tweaked to be more about Dan's personality (for example, "Dan tries very hard to be a good leader.") or omitted altogether.

## What this all means: Discussion

The two hypotheses are mostly supported by this research. The survey experiment and interviews back the suspicion that strategic, positive visibility boost a leader's likability; however, neither the survey nor the interviews unearthed a strong relationship between likability and trust. The study's findings support the idea that one's previous experiences with leaders will influence one's perception of a current leader.

When the preceding literature review, expert interviews and survey experiment are examined as a package through the lens of the three theories outlined, several key learnings emerge.

**Positive visibility—opportunities to show leaders appearing genuinely engaged—helps build a leader's likability.** The survey experiment results indicate that leaders who are strategically shown in positive situations, interacting with employees while appearing affable and confident, are thought to be “nicer” and more likable.

**But likability has almost no significant relationship to trust.** The survey results implied that likability does not build employee confidence in a leader's business decisions. Expert interviews built upon that theme: trust is, seemingly, more about capability, competence and fairness than about a leader being a “nice” person.

**Personal trust and professional trust are two different things.** Employees can trust their leader is a kind, smart, caring individual, but that trust doesn't automatically transfer to the leader's ability to run the company. Trust is a multi-faceted construct, and while it's possible to trust someone on a personal level, that trust doesn't necessary extend to a person's professional reputation.

**A current leader is affected by ghosts of leaders past.** The survey experiment supported the Theory of Managing Uncertainty, which states that employees base perceptions of leaders on previous experiences and previously-formed opinions. One horrible boss will “shell shock” an employee to the point where he or she is more guarded and does not trust any leader as easily as he or she once did.

**Both likability and trust are multi-faceted; there is no magic bullet.** There is no single tactic or message that is guaranteed to build either likability or trust, because individuals form those perceptions in unique ways. Attribution Theory states that when deciding how to feel about a leader, employees first make assumptions about what motivated those actions: is my boss giving me a raise because I'm doing a good job, or because he expects me to work longer hours? According to the Theory of Managing Uncertainty, employees base these perceptions of leaders on previous experiences and opinions that a leader cannot control. Furthermore, Social Judgment Theory posits that when a new idea or person enters an individual's perception, the person is only willing to accept it if it falls within their latitude of acceptance—which, again, is predetermined and cannot be (initially) affected by the new idea or person.

These three theories are based in the beliefs that human beings use past experiences to judge new situations and are wary to change their opinions. This shows how tricky it can be for a leader (particularly a new leader) to build likability or trust: everyone wants something slightly different from that leader and initial impressions are not changed quickly or easily.

**Authenticity is key in building both trust *and* likability.** Attribution Theory reminds us that it's not necessarily *what* you do, but *how people perceive* you doing it—a concept that was confirmed by several of the experts interviewed. Because individuals use their own judgments, biases and egos to attribute the reasons behind others' actions, it doesn't matter if you're doing "all the right things"—it only matters how those things are perceived by your audience. You can shake all the hands, donate all the money and host all the private listening sessions you want, but if people attribute these actions to a sense of obligation or perceive that you're not all that enthusiastic about being there, you will actually *hurt* your relationship with them.

Several expert interviewees stressed the need for leaders to be true to their strengths, rather than trying to fit into an artificial ideal of "the perfect leader." Different leaders excel through different

forms of visibility (for example, some people are very comfortable in front of large crowds, but appear frozen and anxious on video) and each leader should stick to what works for him or her specifically—not what has worked for others in the past.

In the end, this study suggests that leaders concerned about building employees' trust in them should focus less on being likable individuals and more on being consistent, engaged and genuine. It also highlights the powerful role employees' experiences with past leaders play in their impressions of current leaders, and opens the door to discussion and research around how leaders can effectively overcome the "ghosts of leaders past."

## **How this can be applied: Recommendations**

A large part of any corporate communications professional is leadership consultation: advising leaders on the most effective and efficient way to disseminate important messages to his or her audience. This study has unearthed several key, data-supported recommendations that any communications practitioner should keep in mind when consulting with leaders, especially new leaders.

### **1. Advise leaders to keep their employees close—and their communications consultants**

**closer.** Considering how vital trust is – and how much it hinges on employees' perceptions of their leader—it behooves leaders to employ and frequently consult a communications professional to help manage his or her leadership persona. Business leaders should learn a lesson from politicians, who traditionally keep their press secretaries/communications directors in their inner circle: when your image is an essential aspect of your ability to lead, you need someone whose only job is to protect, maintain and improve it.

### **2. Use media with which the leader is most comfortable, regardless of fads.** There will always be a fancy new communication tool to tempt leaders: viral videos, Twitter, etc. (The author remembers one senior leader who was asked to participate in a pilot project that created a



life-sized, motion-activated, video-screen replica of himself to set in a public lobby and offer on-demand wayfinding assistance. The leader enthusiastically agreed, but the finished product was awkward and off-putting; it was removed from the lobby after a few weeks of negative feedback.) But in the end, authenticity and openness is critical to building that all-important “leader presence,” so leaders should be allowed to communicate in ways they are comfortable with. Some come across stilted and wooden on video, some have problems presenting in front of large groups. Help the leader find his or her “sweet spot” and push important messages through that channel whenever possible: discourage the use of tools that might work for others but clearly don’t bring out the best in the leader you’re currently advising.

3. **Use visibility opportunities to show the leader being collaborative, open, inquisitive and engaged, rather than simply being “fun” or “nice.”** Publishing a picture of your company president sitting with her family at the annual all-employee picnic is nice and may help build her likability, but likability doesn’t foster trust. Instead, show her at the picnic interacting with employees and *their* families, which will nurture the impression that she truly cares about its workers. Caring about her own family is relatable, but caring about employees’ families breeds a sense of openness and loyalty.
4. **Advise leaders to stay in character.** Consistency is a key factor of trust, which applies both to specific messages and leaders’ overall actions. A leader should react similarly to similar situations: a bank C.E.O. should respond with equal enthusiasm and support when a small, rural branch opens as he does when a large, suburban branch opens. Remember: leaders’ actions aren’t as important as how those actions are *perceived*. Consistently and predictability help positively frame employees’ perceptions. For example, a C.E.O.’s decision

to publicly sponsor an animal-rights organization could be made for all the right reasons, but might be viewed with suspicion if such causes have not been supported in the past.

5. **Encourage the leader to be him or herself—within limits.** Authenticity is a crucial piece of leader trust. Remember the simple point summed up earlier in this paper by Judith Petts: “...people are better able to judge the trustworthiness of those they know than those they do not” (2008, p. 823). It is tempting for communications professionals to ghostwrite leaders’ blogs, zealously guard video outtakes or heavily script in-person events to ensure “perfection,” but if employees feel that a leader’s persona is manufactured or disingenuous, they will assume the leader has something to hide and will view the leader’s actions and words with suspicion. That being said, leaders should be discouraged from “over-sharing” in an attempt to seem genuine. If Facebook doesn’t come naturally to a leader, she shouldn’t be forced to use it, as her posts and comments will likely betray her discomfort. Even if she is a Facebook fanatic, there are some things that should not be shared with a larger employee audience. Using your personal profile to share photos of you with your dog at the lake is fine, but posting pictures of you *in a bikini* with your dog at the lake is inadvisable. Remember, Social Judgment Theory states that employees will hold leaders to different (i.e. higher) standards than they hold themselves—be human, but not *too* human.

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## Appendix

### Exhibit A

**Name** Cindy Fruitrail, vice president of communications and public affairs, Fairview Health Services

**Date** March 23, 2015

**Location:** Vivo Kitchen, Apple Valley, Minn.

**1. Please tell me a bit about your professional experience, specifically around leadership communication.**

I've been with Fairview for 17 years. Currently head up Public Affairs and Communication function, support the CEO and leadership team, work with board and manage a team of phenomenal communications team.

Over the last 4-5 years in particular, have worked with several CEOs and other leaders as they've come into the organization, having conversations about what they want to be known for. How important is it to them that they be seen as visible, vs. known for their business acumen. Identify their platform. Working with them to suggest communication techniques and tactics.

There's been great, great diversity in leaders, in terms of... one particular CEO believed his charge from the board was to be a peacemaker and keep the status quo. He wanted to be known as someone anybody could approach, so he worked a lot on being visible at the front lines. He was at every employee picnic and physician meeting.

Another leader believed his charge from the board was to fundamentally change business practices, so he spent a big amount of time outside of the company – what kind of legislators do I need to meet with, how do I get the company on the map? He believed that the internal workings of his company was up to his team – it's the managements' job to keep the company running while he was out...

There was a leader who understood that, you need a presence and you thought about the employees often enough—stopping into the facilities to see staff or sending them regular messages. In that case, he did want to be more personal. We did a lot more photos of him with people directly, but... he was certainly, in his day job trying to solve a fundamental issue with partnerships and future structure of the company. But if you asked employees that, they'd say, "He was just a nice guy! He was always around!"

Likability and trust is a lot about how connected you are to the leader. If you're a nurse on the unit, you mostly want a sense that you like the guy. If something happens or there's budget cuts, you think that he's not a mean person. You think, okay, I get it, and you trust him enough to go with it. But people who are really, really close to decision being made, or committees where the actual decision-making work is happening don't care as much about likability. Was there research there, was there solid business dynamics?

Part of me thinks that, for a leader of a large organization of any type, you have to be likable to some degree to even get in. But for true, long-term enduring success, I think the credibility and business savvy and some judgement are a bigger factor.

Our climate is very relationship-based, so you have to invest in being likable. People won't even talk to you about real stuff unless they think you're a likable, decent human being. I think about what Target is going through right now – he needed to make some serious business decisions. .. Even though he had really, really hard things to do, he was out talking to employees. He did in-person interviews with the Star Tribune, which the old one never, ever did. I know more about this new CEO than I ever did about the old one.

## **2. What are some tactics you've used to increase leadership visibility?**

Very orchestrated road shows, touring the different facilities. One-on-one meetings with key influencers (physician leaders, board members), and figuring out a way to amplify those moments. How do you capture a photo of an event with broader audience, constituents, so that one interaction can spread further?

Videos are very hard, because leaders are so different with what they're comfortable with. We had one leader who was very, very good with walking around and chit-chatting, but you put him on the stage and it feels like all the energy was leaked out. In that more formal presentation style, it did not work so well. We had another leader who was SO introverted, so in a room full of employees, he would shut down, but put him on a stage and he would light up because he loved talking about the future of healthcare.

Sometimes, a community is very, very rigid in what they expect from a leader, and if they don't fit in that box, they're not going to make that. I've always thought, would there be a way to make them more human through transparency? Because people would know who they are and how they work, and not expect them to be that person. But if you admit you're not good at something, people don't like that either, and leaders aren't raised like that.

I actually believe that what makes a leader the most effective is someone who have a compelling vision. People want to follow something, they don't want to follow a person just for the sake of following. They want to go somewhere. The leaders, when we've been in limbo, have had a harder go of it than people who have clearly said, here's where we're going. Versus, "we're figuring it out! We're in transition."

You don't show up to work because you like somebody! In healthcare, luckily, most people are doing meaningful work day in and day out, by the nature of their job, but in other jobs, when you DO have to rely on people for a vision, and a leader can communicate that really well, that leader is more likely to succeed.

### **2a. How do you judge if these methods have been effective in helping people get to recognize, know, and ultimately trust, the leader?**

I have found that the most effective tools are finding the influencers in the organization and they have a tidbit about the leader, in terms of something the leader did that was caring, genuine or thoughtful. Who they are as a person and what's important to them. Because when they say, "I actually heard that..." For example, if the leader can't be somewhere, but the right person knows why he's not there... building advocates for the leader within the organization.

## **3. In your professional opinion and experience, do employees tend to trust leaders they like on a personal level, and vice versa? How can you tell?**

There was one leader I worked with whom everybody liked to no end, because he was really good at remembering something personal about everyone he interacted with. If you were going on a trip

with your family, he would ask about it a year later. He was amazing with interpersonal, relationship-building, but in terms of professional respect, his legacy was, he was a really nice guy. And that's it. Under that scenario, that status quo worked, and we weren't driving anything major at the time. We just needed someone to mind the store.

There was a different leader who had the respect of physicians because... he was always the smartest person in the room. You knew when he showed up, he was going to have a million questions for you and they would be meaningful. When you left, you would've advanced an idea 10 steps from when you started. That got him a long way with leaders and others, but in terms of broad likability... people didn't dislike him, but it was, wow, he's a smart guy and he'll make smart decisions. But when he did make decisions, there was more questioning and hesitancy of front-line staff because they didn't know him. If they were really close to him, you would've done it, but if you were front-line staff, you would've questioned.

Whereas the likable, dude, he could've asked people to show up and rake his yard and people would've turned out!

Type of company you work for, how close you are to the leader and what the company needs (are you trying to get somewhere major, or just holding the status quo)? I think the further away you get from the leader, likability does equal trust.

**4. Talk about internal vs. external likability. If a CEO makes an effort to get the public to like him, will internal employees like him more? Or less?**

I think, in a lot of organizations, it does. When you see your leader willing to be very public, transparent and vocal and visible, they're gonna take it on the chin for the company, that goes a long, long way. In the dynamic known as Fairview, that has not always worked for our leaders very well. We live in a resource-constrained environment, so they think, "If they're out there talking to THOSE people, that's less time speaking to me and MY needs." They view the CEO as having to be here taking care of your chicks in the house, vs. taking care of everyone else. They're caretakers, so they want the CEO here taking care of them.

**4a. Did you tailor the way you presented each man based upon their personalities?**

There's a lot of catering, because if a leader's not comfortable, it's miserable and people know instantly and it's hard to recover from that. A lot of times, a leader will come in and say, what works HERE? They want to connect with people the way they have before, but yeah, that won't work for you. There have been instances where I've said, "This has worked in the past, but we're NOT going to do this for you!"

Communication is huge, it's how you connect and build that trust, so if you're not effectively communicating, you lose that. No CEO is hired who wasn't previously successful in SOME organization, and you come into the new context and you think, "You're awful!" What they're used to is not what's gonna work here.

In my career, I've gotten faster and faster with that feedback. The current leader I'm working with, we did a meeting in the morning, we debriefed for a half-hour, and he did another meeting in the afternoon and people said, "WOW! What happened in an hour!?" There are some leaders who say they want the feedback, but don't expect you to provide it.

5. **Can you share an example you've seen, either personally or through your professional network, of a leader whom people *didn't* particularly like as a person, but trusted as a business leader?**

I think physician leaders are great examples of that. Take our surgeons or VPMA, and you don't always s like the people – they're short, they're a little gruff, they're busy and want everyone to know it. But they're given a level of credibility instantly because of their title and position. I think, because of their content knowledge, we put up with them. I think if you're specialized, you're given some slack on the likability side because of what you can offer in terms of knowledge and skill. But if you're mostly a leader/administrator, your job is to bring people together, so you're relationship skills is more important.

6. **You are a team leader, as well. Talk about any efforts you've made to get your team members to like and/or trust you. What is your personal opinion about the relationship between leader likability and leader trust?**

I think managing it for yourself is way harder than managing it for yourself. We're a smaller team, but it's incredibly personal what people expect from you as a leader. TO have a really good relationship with employee A is incredibly different from Employee X. I'm more aware of those personal preferences, which I think makes it harder. I tend to believe good intentions and wanting to do good work in a respectful environment will generate a level of likability in a leader, whether or not we like the same wine. I don't worry about likability as much as I used to.

For me, that's high on the likability scale – is my manager a decent human being. How self-absorbed are they in their personal environment? That's what's important to ME, but it's personal. I've had leaders who were just so absorbed in their personal likability, that it became miserable.

It does not matter how chaotic the organization is, because until you demonstrate that you care about me as a person and acknowledge me, I'm not willing to talk about the rest. Which has been incredibly challenging.

## Exhibit B

**Name** Erika Taibl, Acting Director of Corporate Communications for Land O' Lakes Inc.

**Date** April 3, 2015

**Location** Muffaletta restaurant, St. Paul, Minn.

1. **Please tell me a bit about your professional experience, specifically around leadership communication.**

That's about 90% of what I've done for the last decade. I've worked with executives at the tippy-top, that person's direct reports, and then the direct reports of that next level. I think a lot of the comm. decisions around leadership visibility are made by the leader in a counseling session, what's the best thing for that leader, for the audience, what feels most natural.

Communication pros might have a specific idea of what visibility looks like, but that might not fit for that leader. It's a give-and-take.



I worked for Organization A, and we had a prescribed way to do this – timing and cadence, the talking points we'd provide, the structure of the session. We observed the leaders executing it different ways, because it didn't feel right to them. 2 of the 5 leaders didn't want to have just talking points, so they made their own slides. We'd recommended a more natural, casual conversation, but they ended up being more casual with the slides, because they felt more comfortable.

If you fit the leader into some sort of construct, they'll go there with you because you recommend it, but it won't be them, and you might do more damage.

## **2. What are some tactics you've used to increase leadership visibility?**

Leaders being present for team meetings or recognition moments, open employee forums, drop-in sessions if a hot topic is going on, making a leader available.

At Org. B, we have some leaders who do listening sessions, where they invite random 10 people to come to lunch. I think those people are distrustful at the start, and it's up to the leader to set the tone. "I'm not here to do HR stuff, I'm here to understand what's working and what's not."

Some of them are duds! It's like a dinner party where you introduce old friends to new friends, and it just flops. You can have the perfect storm of a great leader and a good authentic moment to them, but have a dud of a crowd. It takes both sides, there's mutuality with trust.

I always think a good tactic for a leader, if they answer honestly and directly, a Q&A. They can establish credibility, trust and likability all at the same time. But that has to be their style. Org B. has a senior leader who has a very different public persona than a personal persona, so the strategy there is to keep him out of the public! We don't let him interact with a lot of employees.

The senior leader doesn't have to be the one and only.

### **2a. How do you judge if these methods have been effective in helping people get to recognize, know, and ultimately trust, the leader?**

Certainly, there's the formal methods – internal comm. effectiveness survey, those measure the trends. In the moment, a good sign at a Q&A is more questions being asked, head nodding and authentic moments of laughter. When a leader lets down their guard, you can feel it in the room.

### **2b. Why do you think these certain methods worked better than others?**

There's a lot to be said for standardization and for best practices, but you still have to take the individual leader into account. That's part of my evolution as a communication leader—you're pushing an agenda, but it can't be a one-way conversation. I also think leaders can change. When Ridges did respond quickly and have a positive outcome, it starts to change how they feel about doing it.

## **3. In your professional opinion and experience, do employees tend to trust leaders they like on a personal level, and vice versa? How can you tell?**

Some of the most conservative leaders, in public, who don't use Twitter or Facebook, have the most trust because their audiences know who they are in a different way and can respect the unique things they bring, with might not be the personality or persona. Think of Warren Buffet—he's never gonna be a giant personality, but people love and trust him.

**4. Talk about internal vs. external likability. If a CEO makes an effort to get the public to like him, will internal employees like him more? Or less?**

If you know a guy has a family or likes fishing, there's this sense of, oh, I know him or her. Sometimes, those sharing moments, if they're too structured, they can backfire. If they're not authentic. I always tell leaders, only mention your family or private life if it feels comfortable. Some people hate talking about their kids at work – don't make me do it.

I was in Arizona for a big sales conference, and all the big leaders were there, but then one of them went mountain biking with a group of people. To have these big unscripted moments where they can be themselves and get to know other people.

**4a. You worked with two different leaders at Fairview in the past few years. Which do you think employees *liked* more? Why?**

I think a lot of people thought they knew Leader B, but it was all a ruse. But people bought into it. Leader A, was much more held back, but he was by far the most trustworthy, likeable one.

**5. Can you share an example you've seen, either personally or through your professional network, of a leader whom people *didn't* particularly like as a person, but trusted as a business leader?**

I know a lot of leaders who... there's a high level of self-awareness, and some leaders know that. You can throw any best practice at them, and they'll make it work. At Fairview Southdale, there was a leader who, you could throw pretty much anything at him and he would be OK. He'd do a good job. Any mistrust of him was based on, he'd say one thing and do something else.

In my current org., I can think of one senior executive who strikes fear in the hearts of people because she's so dang smart. She holds people accountable. I don't know if they like her, but I think they totally trust her and would do anything she says. She's incredibly fair because she's data driven, but you darn well better know your stuff. I generally think likability is pretty import.

That's a thing leaders really fall down on – before you ask someone something, you have to let them know what they can or cannot influence. You need to be clear, you can influence the rollout of this, but you can't influence the decision.

**6. You are a team leader, as well. Talk about any efforts you've made to get your team members to like and/or trust you. What is your personal opinion about the relationship between leader likability and leader trust?**

When I was first asked to take on the interim role, I set up one-to-ones with everybody, and three questions, which I let them know ahead of time. What's a pain point or a barrier to your being happy and successful here? It's amazing how when you ask a group that, they will identify the same things. I have made some progress on those painpoints, so that's a way to build trust. Candor, being transparent and open.

Sometimes, I think the leader makes the mistake of thinking that the communicating of something IS the doing of it. I've communicated how important this is to me, so now I'm done. But they get way more credibility when they show up and DO it.

No one needs to know you were a farmer in Ohio, I want to know your guiding principles. Beer or scotch? That's the kind of things that come after the trust is built. If you share them too early, it backfires. I am always interested not in what kind of music you like, but what was the best class you took in college? That kind of question reveals more about how a person thinks.

### Exhibit C

**Name** Rebekah Fawcett, Vice President of internal communications for U.S. Bank

**Date** April 20, 2015

**Location** Crave restaurant, downtown Minneapolis, Minn.

- 1. Please tell me a bit about your professional experience, specifically around leadership communication. How have you helped influence leaders' visibility and help build employees' trust in them?**

Been with USBank since Dec. 2012, large grocery company where I was for 12.5 years, primarily communications roles, supporting executive leadership since I was 22 on, from re-orgs to leader changes, to labor situations to what should we remodel this breakroom to look like.

It was more about presence and leadership visibility. Likability was never one of our end goals—it was more, how do I get people to take me seriously, how do I get them to trust that I have a better opinion to say than the union does. That's more of the focus—it was never, "I want people to like me." I think there's a certain stigma in the work environment where, personal emotions and feelings are not things that demonstrate strength. I see more people focus on engagement scores, versus how well am I liked?

I'm a strong Type A/business-first mentality, so I tend to think that being likable is not as important as being trusted or respected, but I think that's just my style. And in certain situations, you do have to do that—I've seen leaders who everyone really loves, but they don't respect them as a leader. I do think if people like the leader, they're more likely to be engaged with them and walk through fire with them, but I don't know if that's indicative of, I trust that person, too.

- 2. What are some tactics you've used to increase leadership visibility?**

When I was 22, it was that textbook approach: newsletters to walk-arounds, town halls, leadership chats. We hadn't gotten into the video aspect until just before I left my last job. We had just started getting into that personal connection – the blogs, monthly emails, Q&A open session with leaders.

- 2a. Which of these tactics have worked best, and in what situations?**

I usually start with the town hall. At my last company, we started with the jump start—without the leader in the room, they would brainstorm a list of questions. The leader would come back in and go through all of the questions without knowing who asked it. It was very scary but it was really effective. It builds into the concept of authenticity. Leaders could not prepare in advance, so unless they were super slick, you couldn't prepare for that. If you had a leader who would

completely B.S. their way through an answer, it gave you a sense of them. If someone said, “I’m not comfortable answering that,” it was more understandable.

**2b. How do you measure if these methods have been effective in helping people get to recognize, know, and ultimately trust, the leader?**

I think that’s one of the hardest things I’ve found—I haven’t found a good measure for it, other than, are people more likely to go to that leader versus talk behind their backs. Are our engagement scores going up now and we can eliminate other things to know that’s what it was.

I’ve seen 360s done where you’d go through and ask how well that person is doing, and the third-party will come in and share those results with the person.

Both of the companies I’ve worked with have been Fortune 500, and one was Fortune 100. The aspects of what made that person likable or trusted was more geared toward how well did they do what they said they would do. I worked for a company where the old CEO really hand-held with the new guy for months and month. And that worked really well, but over time, they started to see that in his style, he was very attention-deficit. You just spent all this time implementing an idea that I’m not longer interested in. And when that fell out, there was less motivation for employees to be behind him.

My current CEO, everybody loves. He’s treated like a rock star everywhere he goes, but I don’t know that we have a successor with that same reputation. And when you think about transitioning that leader later on.

When you lose hero worship and go with someone who is totally different, that’s a problem. Everybody adores him right now, but his predecessor was the exact opposite, from what I’m told, and part of that is what lead to the atmosphere we have now.

**3. In your professional opinion and experience, do employees tend to be more engaged if they like a leader, or if they trust a leader? How can you tell?**

IT depends on what you’re talking about. If they walk through fire for someone, did you do it because you like them or because you trusted them? I think for me, personally, I’m more likely to follow a person I trust than a person I like. I will follow someone I like AND trust further! But I’m more likely, as a person, to follow someone I know has my back. I may not like that person, I may not have the same style and philosophy, but if I can trust them to get us through the hard times, I will follow them.

For me, work is just one piece of my life—it’s a large piece, but I want to know that I’m safe, safe and secure, rather than, do I like Joe? It’s the same thing with being a parent—I’m going to guide them and lead and pick up the pieces when they fall, but I’m not meant to be their best friend.

**4. Do you think Millennials now expect to like their bosses and know personal stuff about them?**

I think there’s an expectation of, if I’m real, you’re real. It’s more reciprocal. But what I think is different is that likability is momentary in the social media space. Think about one person tweeting something they shouldn’t have tweeted, that’s the end. It’s done. There seems to be less forgiveness for a gaffe. We live in a social space and you can completely vilify something in a moment, and there’s this idea of how do you weed out what’s not true? It’s more important to be credible and authentic; a lot of leaders today did not grow up in that space and are not comfortable there, and it’s clear.

One of my old bosses loved Twitter, he was all about Twitter. But it died within 6 months, because what I found was, people were saying, I don't want to follow you on Twitter. I don't want to connect with you on here.

**5. Talk about internal vs. external likability. If a CEO makes an effort to get the public to like him, will internal employees like him more? Or less?**

You can be out, being loved by the world, but if you're not taking care of what's at home, that's what matters. With politicians, when there's an election, if that candidate is out campaigning all the time, the voters are thinking, what the heck, where is my senator?

The closest I've seen is here at the bank. Richard is very beloved internally and very well respected by his peers, but there will be articles critiquing him as being too Pollyanna, but people don't glom onto that—that hasn't been my experience.

**6. Can you share an example you've seen, either personally or through your professional network, of a leader whom people *didn't* particularly like as a person, but trusted as a business leader?**

There was a guy at my last job—brilliant, but horrible to work with. But they walked through fire with him because they knew he was very contemplative and deliberate, but he's not the guy you want to take out for a beer afterward. He's not that kinda guy. His authentic self was sitting back and doing what he wanted to do – he's not going to show you where the bathroom is. You can find it on your own, you're a big kid. If you did your work and worked hard, he stood up for you. But he wasn't liked. He got everything done, and there was no question.

People can tell when you're not being real. And if you try to force the authenticity, it will hurt you.

We had this huge leadership meeting, and the executives would come in and present. We have one leader who was sort of standoffish and people didn't connect to her very well. We had another leader who was AWFUL at this stuff. So we thought, let's put them together! It will bring the folksy one down a bit, but bring the other one up. It was the worst idea. The one who was a bit standoffish, when she was on, she was on. The other one would try to ad-lib and it was awful when she went off-script. Painful. The one who's really, really bad in larger settings was amazing in small-group settings. Get her in a room with 12 people, give them some box lunches, and she was real, she was authentic, she would tell you what was on her mind. Because that's where she was comfortable. Standing up in front of a huge audience as the expert, she was not comfortable. That hurt her more than helped her.

There was another leader we had who was coached to be NOT as authentic! He would respond to every single email he got, say things like, "Our company is the G.M. of the grocery industry," which meant we're going bankrupt tomorrow. He was such a positive person overall, but he really believed that the company was going bankrupt, so he'd tell everyone. There was a lot of, remove the emotion to be more real in this moment. That was a hard battle.

You have to be multi-faceted, and that's tough for a lot of people. People who are all about the numbers, that doesn't work. Or people who focus on likability.

**7. You are a team leader, as well. Talk about any efforts you've made to get your team members to like and/or trust you. What is your personal opinion about the relationship between leader likability and leader trust?**

My team started growing quite a bit last year and one of the questions recruiters asked was, "How do I describe my leadership style?" and I struggled with that. I asked people on the team to describe my work style. Someone said, you're a "get your stuff done and don't make a mess, but if you make a mess, own up to it and I will have your back" leader. To me, that said it's less about people thinking I'm likable, but more about them trusting them. Certainly, I'm human. I want people to like me. I don't think you can force people to like you. At the end of the day, if I have to make a tough decision, I want you to trust that I have their best interest in mind. I'm not going to do harm, I'm going to try to make things better. I think that ability for people to know that you have their back is an aspect of likability.

Respect and trust, to me, are way more important than likability. I think likability can be lost in a moment, but it's hard to lose trust and respect.

It's different for men vs. women. I had a female leader, in leadership meetings, when she would give her opinion first, the meeting would shut down. There was no discussion. But when men would go first, there would be healthy discussion and argument. I do think there's significant pressure for women to be liked than to be trusted.

The leader needs to be real. The more I'm in business and I talk to people, the more I want to know that someone's there for me, rather than, will I have a beer with this guy or woman after work. The leaders who spend so much time in the space of, do they like me? Versus, am I getting stuff done? Are less likely to get things done.

Are other leaders willing to take the word of someone who's liked or who's trusted? Who do you want to be your mentor?

**Post-script (emailed the day after the interview):**

Had to tell you that I was thinking this morning about our discussion yesterday, and I don't think I said it, but I do think likability influences trust. I think employees are more likely to give the benefit of the doubt to a leader they like -- willing to be burned a few times to stay in the grace, rather than assume the person they like is unscrupulous or untrustworthy. I don't think that works the other way around; if employees don't like the leader, even if the person is trustworthy, they are aren't likely to stand behind that person if things get heated.

## Exhibit D

**Name** David Therkelsen, retired CEO of non-profit organizations, such as American Red Cross (two field units), Crisis Connection and National Scholastic Press Association (interim), 23 years in Public Relations before that (and 8 years in marketing

**Date** May 18, 2015

**Location** Panera Bread, 809 Nicollet Mall, Minneapolis, Minn.

**1. Please tell me a bit about your professional experience, specifically around leadership.**

Every one of the roles demanded something different of the CEO, but also a lot of engagement on my part with the employee population. Their sizes were a range: Red Cross Chapter he headed was \$6 million and about 130 employees. Crisis Connection was about \$3 million and 44 employees, and the National Association was about 10 employees.

**2. As a leader, how involved were you with internal communications? (Did you write your own all-employee emails, did you have a team that helped you develop strategic messaging, did you host in-person employee forums, etc.)**

This sounds really immodest, but I was a better writer and communicator than most people around me, including my communications directors, from time to time. That solves the problem of trying to communicate in the leader's voice when you're not the leader. I've done executive speechwriting and counseling lots before I got to the leadership level. I was very hands-on [as a leader]. I personally initiated a lot of employee communications, hosted numerous employee gatherings.

One thing I did was, every Wednesday, I'd hang out in a conference room. If 1, 2 or 10 people wanted to come to talk to me, we would. If no one came, I'd bring some files and get some work done. The CEO I worked under was the initiator of this: we had monthly meetings where we recognized longevity. We'd have a nice *hors d'oeuvres* party, give people awards for longevity. I always went to new employee orientations. I'd wrap them up; I wanted to be the final word on working here. I created Eureka; all the senior managers wore togas and we had a good time with it – it was to communicate the idea that employee input and suggestion DO matter. We guarantee it will be attended to on a timeline.

Every day, we had 18 teams who were out collecting blood in a tri-state area. They're out in Blue Earth, Minn., and they may be staying at the best motel which might be the ONLY motel in town. They don't get to take community ed classes because they're on the road. So, a couple times a year, I would go out to one of these mobile sites, get trained to do very basic jobs (preparing the blood collection kits) so I could work on the mobile, and I'd work full days working right on the drive, experiencing the stress, the pressure and the hard work. We stayed at the same motel [as the employees] and I think I never failed to do that twice a year.

We did something called a Convergence Meeting; if the schedulers told me there'd be two teams staying at the Holiday Inn at Mankato, a couple leaders would get in a van, go down and have breakfast with them and give them the info that people in the office routinely had access to.

**3. How important do you think it is for leaders to be visible, either through in-person encounters with employees, direct emails, etc.?**

The literature proves [face-to-face] is more effective. It has potential to be two-way, and most of the time it is. Your column in the employee newsletter, that's fine, but even in today's much more electronic environment, it's still not easy for that to be two-way. The other party has to work at it a lot more. We can discuss, in real time and real terms, what's going on in the organization. I tended to be candid and not to edit myself as the HR director would want me to [laugh] but I never apologized for that.

The top leadership team, not just the CEO, the people at the top, they don't really DO anything that delivers on the mission and the strategy. They SET it, but all execution is really done by the people who work there.

When I was head of marketing for the blood region (before I was the CEO): the way we were going to beat the competition is, we were going to be available. Fairview or the U or North Memorial would *never* have to cancel a procedure because they didn't have blood supply. That was hard to live up to, but that would be our value proposition.

There was an intermediary company between the Red Cross and the hospitals, and sometimes, they would do their best but not be able to fulfill what the hospital needs. That's not what I wanted—I wanted us to import blood from another system and get it out to that client. If they were going to charge us more, tough; if on occasion, somebody in this department had to pay \$1,000 where the reimbursement would be \$210, do it. But the only way to get that behavior is to interact with that kind of employee to make sure they know we really meant it, they wouldn't get fired, and they'd have the knowledge of the strategy and they had a role to play. You can SAY that in an employee newsletter, and I think I did, but I don't think you get the true passionate commitment that you would if you spoke directly to those employees.

People who might have worked there a long time may have been conditioned differently. They could say, "Dave, do you REALLY mean it, you want me to buy high and sell low?" and I could say, "Yes, I mean it, and here's why." We could have that kind of conversation. Now, I worked in smaller organizations where I knew the great, great majority of employees.

**4. What are some tactics you've used to increase employee trust in you?**

See above Q2.

**4a. How do you judge if these methods have been effective?**

I almost do take it on faith. I know from the literature, which is clear, that an engaged workforce with positive relationships in all directions delivers better company performance. Since I know that, if my behaviors were aligned with that principle, I'm willing to take it on faith without doing a lot of metrics or primary validation of that proposition.

I did the math—in our blood region, we did a total of 3,000 transfusable blood products a day. We could find out how many were truly used in life-saving procedures. I could say to them, based on the work you did today, x number of transfusions occurred, all of them helped someone's life, but based on the math on how many were truly life-saving procedures (probably 80), 80 people got a chance to live another day. Every one of those people deserves a chance to live another day, and YOUR work today, made that happen. I would always say that at the end. These were very passionate,



mission-driven people who needed constant feedback of their work, and I Never took that for granted. Everything in healthcare at that time was having to get more business-like, and if you're a long-term mission-driven employee, you're suspicious of that. And I was a driver of that business style, so they needed to hear from me their life-saving impact.

When I went to Crisis Connection, they were doing great work on their mission, but when I went there, they were within months of it being over because they were so weak financially. . At one point, I actually had a payroll clear the bank by \$37. Less than a dollar per employee. My predecessor had told people for years, "The sky is falling, I need you do such-and-such," but she never gave them any specifics and, indeed, we never failed. So when Dave came and said, "this is awful," initially, the reaction was, "We've heard this before." But what I did that my predecessor didn't, was I showed them everything about how dire the situation really was. I showed them everything the board saw. I converted the information to the scale of a \$100,000-per-year household, and you spend \$99,990.... That was the reality of the situation. And they gave me so much credit for that, that they went along with me, and things I said would save the organization. They trusted me, where they didn't trust my predecessor.

**5. As a leader, do you strive more to get employees to *like* you or *trust* you?**

I think trust is the primary consideration, and I did have an explicit goal to be trusted by the employee population. I never had a goal to be LIKED. I don't think it's a legitimate goal, frankly. If my primary goal is to be liked, I might not make the hard decision I need to make. I might let things lapse. But I think a consequence of being trusted is being liked, but the critical goal is to be trusted. They have to know they can count on my word, that I mean my commitments.

But that is a two-edged sword, from the employee point of view. If you come to trust that I'm going to do whatever's necessary to support the requirements of my organization, and you are very invested in the organization, you might feel pretty good that, I can trust Dave to do whatever's need to make us successful, it will also cross your mind that sometimes, what is needed might be to remove your job. But if I've gained your trust more broadly, even if that unfortunate event comes, you'll still trust my motives.

If I've set this goal that I like you, and I need to fire you, it might be the best thing for you, but I still might not do it because I like you.

**6. In your professional opinion and experience, do employees tend to trust leaders they like on a personal level, and vice versa? How can you tell?**

It probably goes both ways; if you are a leader, you want trust to go to likability, not the other way around. Being trusted, clearly by the literature and experience of senior people, being trusted helps meets business goals. You advance the aims of the enterprise by being a trusted, top leader. I don't know what the case is that being liked advances the case of the enterprise. There are ways that being liked can be inimical to the enterprise; performance evaluations that can go against the goals of the enterprise. I Feel very strongly that trust is the proper goal, but if by being trusted, they like you as well and the correlation is pretty strong, all the better.

Someone at the Red Cross I never worked for directly but knew him well – he was a tough old guy, a physician, brusque, impatient, and I probably didn't like him very well when I first knew him. I came to like him but only because I came to know him very well which most people in his work life didn't because he wasn't open to that. But he was trusted because there was no mistaking his passion and commitment to the mission. Everybody knew his uncompromising devotion to the mission of saving

lives. He was also known for his integrity; his word was gold. If he said something was true, whether you wanted it to be true or not, you could trust it was. I do think people trusted him, but I don't know too many people who liked him very much.

**7. Can you share an example you've seen, either personally or through your professional network, of a leader whom people *didn't* particularly like as a person, but trusted as a business leader?**

I've worked once for someone who was a little more invested in being liked than he should've been. It did him a lot of good; he was great in the community because he was such a nice guy, bright and engaging. I think that did the organization lots of good in the community, but not so sure it did nearly as much good inside. I think there was a general suspicion that he was too invested in having everybody like him. I was a direct report of his at the time, and I didn't know if he was telling me what a great job I was doing because I WAS doing a good job. We were unsure of where we stood. Would he really make tough decisions if circumstances required him to? I'm friends with this man to this day – [laugh] I like him! – but I think that was true.

If you're running around with your mental checklist of, "what can I do to make people like me?" people will see that. Especially if it's not seen as genuine.

I have seen careers derail because the person is so good externally, in the outside community, and the board sees that, but they might not see dysfunction internally. I've known people who have been very good outside, but pretty dysfunctional as internal managers; the board sees only the one thing, and sometimes the board is very slow to diagnosis the fact that there are some real issues in this organization.

I think it's different (if you're leading a team vs. a company). Teams are more fluid, and the leader of that team this year might be somebody two years from now because of churn. I think the balance (between likability and trust) would be different, but if you're a leader at any level, you still want to lead from trust, though that relationship won't be as deep or as rich because there's still a musical chair dimension to it.

**Exhibit E**

**Name** Jeff von Gillern, Vice Chairman, Technology and Operation Services, U.S. Bank  
**Date** June 1, 2015  
**Location** U.S. Bank Headquarters, 800 Nicollet Mall, Minneapolis, MN

**1. Please tell me a bit about your professional experience, as well as any relevant leadership roles you've held.**

I've been in financial services and technology and operations for 26 years; 24 of those, I've been either a manager or in a leadership role. I've had various different leadership positions. When I was first managing people, it was a small team. In the operations area of VISA, I started with a shift of about 8 to 12 people, where I was the supervisor. It escalated from there to managing all three shifts, then the department as a whole.

**2. As a leader, how involved are you with internal communications? (Do you write your own all-employee emails, host in-person employee forums, keep a blog, etc.)**

I think communications is really important; probably one of the most important things you have to do as a leader. Communications is not just one-way. I'm a big believer that communication is about listening, too, and to be successful, you have to listen, get in front of people, be with people. Here, we have people across multiple shifts, seven days a week, 365 a year, so you have to make a real effort to get in front of those people. You have to understand the differences in what it means to work from midnight to 8, or 8 to 4.

Strategic roundtables are a good example, those are quarterly. We expanded those to lower-level managers and increased the invitation list to 700 people to get a broader reach. The goal was to equip managers with relevant info about the business, to link what we do in TOS to the bank's overall performance, so they have that connection –what you do in your job aligns with the broader goals of the company.

My direct-report management teams will rotate our meetings to various cities where we have large operation groups; we'll dedicate a half-day to getting in front of all the employees, for an informal chance for them to see us all together. The last one we had was in Portland, we had three sessions, and they were all very well attended.

It's human instinct to be nervous [in front of leaders, and to not be your genuine self], but our job is to break that down and make people feel comfortable. It's hard to do in 30 minutes, but you can make an effort. You can see how the tone in the room changes in the first 15 minutes. We bring some humor into it, we call some people out to let them know we understand what's happening their areas. We're not just there to pontificate. That's part of it – you have to know your audience. Most of my management team, we can say we've either done or have associated with some of the jobs in this department. That's an important connection, and it's important to be humble. And it's not a one-time thing, you have to do it over and over again to build trust.

**3. How important it is for leaders to be visible, either through in-person encounters with employees, direct emails, etc.?**

In our group, my role is to maintain an operating budget, make sure regulatory and audit environment is working the way it should, and I depend on those people to do their jobs. Sometimes, we work harder, work extra, stretch to fix a problem we have, and I want them to know that I'm there behind them, supporting them. It's important to get out and thank people for what they do. IT was employee appreciation month, which is a time.

I put far more value on trust than I do on likability. Trust is fundamental to what we do. You have to lead by example, and it takes time to build trust. Most people, I believe, you have to build trust. You do that by leading by example; trust is a by-product of time.

**4. What are some tactics you've used to increase employee trust in you?**

I don't think about trust as something I wake up and think about, I think it's a by-product of what you do. If you're consistent in your actions, demonstrate transparency and integrity. It doesn't just

happen in a week. I also think people watch how leaders behave in tough times and challenges, to see if they waver on their principles, and people make judgments on those things.

The intersection of likability on that, I worry less about that, because this is business. Any human wants people to like them, so I shouldn't say it's important, but that's not where I would put my energy. It's around doing things that are right for the business, which are right for those employees, and if, along the way, if someone likes you on a personal level, that's great, that's an additive, but that's not what I strive for.

I've never seen successful leaders have active personal lives with people they lead.

#### **4a. How do you judge if these methods are effective?**

We have the Talk To Us [annual employee engagement] survey, which has questions specific to trust on it, and that's a very useful indicator. We score very favorably on that very high in the company, but as that question rolls down, you have pockets where it's not so favorable, and you can see how results correlate to that – where you don't have trust, you don't have results. Obviously, individuals are protected for anonymity. We spend a lot of time, as a management direct report team and as a broader group, with that survey.

#### **5. As a leader, do you strive more to get employees to like you or trust you? Why?**

I think, if I felt that people didn't like me, I might have a problem with that. I don't think any human being wants to know that people likes them. If I thought that people didn't like me, maybe I would be in the wrong job! I would have a problem if I felt like nobody liked me!

#### **6. In your professional experience, do employees tend to trust leaders they like on a personal level, and vice versa? How can you tell?**

I think it's all about how you conduct yourself and how you live your life. The things I'm involved in in the community, for example, I try to demonstrate the same behaviors in those interactions that I do at work. If I was a different person there or I acted differently, tried to be something different, that would create a trust issue, because it's a disconnection.

We took some expense actions last year that involved unpaid time off for a subset of our people. It's not a popular thing to do, and that can create trust issues, people can say, wow, you can take my salary away from me. We spent a lot of time communication why we did that, but in the end, the press picked up some of my communication and selected two sentences out of two different paragraphs for 5 or 6 paragraphs... it was in the paper, that was relevant to their story. The story was about top leaders' salaries, and here are people whose salaries are being frozen, using my quotes. Part of that was taken out of context. I felt like I broke the trust of my group. You can work hard at it, but sometimes you take some blowback. (July to November last year)

Last week I was in Milwaukee, and I brought it up in context as preparing for this year.

#### **7. Can you share an example you've seen, either personally or through your professional network, of a leader whom people *didn't* particularly like as a person, but trusted as a business leader?**

In the past five years, I became part of the managing committee, and that's a whole different peer group –there are times when you build that trust, but then the environment changes around you. I've had to spend time over the past five years to build trust with another peer group. We're probably one of the largest consumers of capital in this bank, and every month we have a meeting so I'm the one there asking for the money, and I feel there's a level of trust there that we've earned, but we've built that trust over time, so people are willing to not micro-managing your business, so they can validate their interest in what you're doing. But those things change – people change, roles change.

There are 14 people on that committee, people who don't work for me and I don't work for them, but it's the company's money. You can watch somebody new come into that group, you think about Shailesh replacing Pam Joseph, and he presented a large proposal, and he did so in a very informed way, and none of us know him, but we trust him. We started at that level. Over time, we will get to know him and see. You have to have to be effective it's more than having the trust of the people who work for you – if you don't have the trust of people who work with you work with and who you work for, you're done.

## Exhibit F

### **Leadership Trust and Likability - Summer 2015**

This survey is part of a project to complete my M.A. in Strategic Communication. It will take you between 8 and 15 minutes; your answers are anonymous. You may quit the survey at any time. Thank you! - Heather V.

How old are you?

- ☐ Under 21 years old
- ☐ 21-38
- ☐ 39-50
- ☐ 51-60
- ☐ 61-69
- ☐ 70 or older

If Under 21 years old Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

Throughout your lifetime, how many total years have you been employed by a company of any size (i.e. not self-employed)?

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ 1-5 years
- ☐ 6-15 years
- ☐ 16-25 years
- ☐ 26-35 years
- ☐ 36 years or more

Pretend you are an employee of the XYZ Company, whose C.E.O. is a man named Dan Fletcher. Please view these next several pieces of employee communications carefully.



### Random Group 1 ("Bad Dan")

C.E.O. Dan Fletcher (shown here) believes XYZ Company's recent signing of the important Widgets, Inc. account was a direct result of employees' hard work, long hours and extra effort. "We couldn't have landed this important account without everyone pitching in," Mr. Fletcher says.



C.E.O. Dan Fletcher (shown here, far right) recently returned from a business summit in Oslo, saying the experience was an important step to strengthening XYZ Company's presence in international dealings.



Dan Fletcher, C.E.O. of XYZ Company recently toured our newest office building (503 Lincoln Street) with members of his family. Dan's grandson, Liam (shown here), stays busy while work continues around him.



### Random Group 2 (“Good Dan”)

C.E.O. Dan Fletcher (shown here, far left) believes XYZ Company’s recent signing of the important Widgets, Inc. account was a direct result of employees’ hard work, long hours and extra effort. “We couldn’t have landed this important account without everyone pitching in,” Mr. Fletcher says.



C.E.O. Dan Fletcher (shown here, foreground) recently returned from a business summit in Oslo, saying the experience was an important step to strengthening XYZ Company’s presence in international dealings.



Dan Fletcher, C.E.O. of XYZ Company, recently toured our newest office building (503 Lincoln Street) with members of his family.



Random Group 3 ("Neutral Dan")

(Note: This is a screenshot of an XYZ Company employee newsletter. Please review the text you are able to fully read—don't worry if some words or sentences appear cut off.)

# IN THE KNOW, ON THE GROW

*A quick read for XYZ employees*

Volume 3, Issue 10



## NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

- Don't miss the next XYZ-sponsored happy hour at Brit's Pub, Thursday, June 4, from 4 to 6 p.m. Spouses

## WIDGETS, INC. ACCOUNT BOOSTS XYZ'S BOTTOM LINE

C.E.O. Dan Fletcher believes XYZ Company's recent signing of the important Widgets, Inc. account was a direct result of employees' hard work, long hours and extra effort.

"We couldn't have landed this important account without everyone pitching in," Mr. Fletcher says.

(Note: This is a screenshot of an XYZ Company employee newsletter. Please review the text you are able to fully read—don't worry if some words or sentences appear cut off.)

# IN THE KNOW, ON THE GROW

*A quick read for XYZ employees*

Volume 3, Issue 2



## JOIN OUR HEART WALK TEAM TODAY!

- Walk with the XYZ team at the upcoming American Heart Association Heart Walk, Wednesday, June 11, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

## OSLO SUMMIT 'AN IMPORTANT STEP' FOR XYZ

C.E.O. Dan Fletcher recently returned from a business summit in Oslo. He says the experience was an important step to strengthening XYZ Company's presence in international dealings.

(Note: This is a screenshot of an XYZ Company employee newsletter. Please review the text you are able to fully read—don't worry if some words or sentences appear cut off.)

# IN THE KNOW, ON THE GROW

*A quick read for XYZ employees*

Volume 2, Issue 12



## OPEN ENROLLMENT COMING SOON

- Mark your calendars for our  
benefits period's open

## C.E.O. TOURS OUR NEW LINCOLN STREET FACILITY

Dan Fletcher, C.E.O. of XYZ Company, recently toured our newest office building (503 Lincoln Street) with members of his family.

Remember: you are pretending to be an employee of XYZ Company, whose C.E.O. is Dan Fletcher. Based on what you know about Dan, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Completely disagree	Somewhat disagree	Undecided/ Not sure	Somewhat agree	Completely agree
I like Dan Fletcher.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dan Fletcher is smart.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dan Fletcher is a nice person.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dan Fletcher is a capable leader.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dan Fletcher cares about his employees.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Remember: you are pretending to be an employee of XYZ Company. Please read this short memo from your company's C.E.O., Dan Fletcher.

XYZ COMPANY

1254 INDUSTRY DRIVE, APPLE VALLEY, MINN., 55100

5/20/2015

Valued XYZ Employees,

*As you know, the business atmosphere has been particularly challenging as of late, and our company has had to struggle to remain competitive. A team of company leaders has attempted to implement several different solutions, but unfortunately, we have exhausted all other options.*

*Effective June 30, we will be eliminating 20% of XYZ Company's employees. Layoffs will be made strategically, based on a new restructuring plan we believe is necessary to help us stay competitive.*

*This was a difficult decision for me and my leadership team to make. I am truly saddened by these layoffs, but this is the only option we feel will secure this company's future.*

*You probably have many questions. Please do not hesitate to talk to your managers, who have information about the logistics of the coming weeks, or to reach out to me directly.*

Dan Fletcher  
C.E.O.

After reading the memo from C.E.O. Dan Fletcher about XYZ Company laying off 20% of employees, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Completely disagree	Somewhat disagree	Undecided / Not sure	Somewhat agree	Completely agree
These layoffs are necessary for XYZ Company to stay competitive.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dan Fletcher is saddened by the layoffs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This was a difficult decision for Dan Fletcher to make.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dan Fletcher exhausted all other options before considering layoffs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

What is your current employment status?

- ☐ I'm a full-time student, not working.
- ☐ I'm working full-time or part-time (this includes being self-employed or working from home).
- ☐ I'm a stay-at-home parent, unemployed or between jobs.
- ☐ I'm retired.


In your real life (you are no longer pretending to be employed by XYZ Company), how large is your current company overall? (For example, if you are a bank teller, how many employees does the entire bank have, not just your particular branch?) If you're unemployed or retired, how large was the company you most recently worked for?

- ☐ 2 to 30 employees
- ☐ 31 to 100 employees
- ☐ 101 to 500 employees
- ☐ 501 to 5,000 employees
- ☐ 5,001 to 15,000 employees
- ☐ 15,001 to 35,000 employees
- ☐ Larger than 35,000 employees



Think about your real-life job -- you are no longer pretending to work for XYZ Company -- and your company's top leader (president or C.E.O). Answer the following questions with 0 being "not at all" and 100 being "very much"; click the slider and drag it to your desired number.

If you are currently unemployed, think about the top leader of the last company you worked for.

	Not at all	To a certain extent	Very much		
	0	25	50	75	100
I like my current / former leader as a person.					
I trust my current / former leader to make smart business decisions.	